THE OCTOBER STORM AND AFTER

Stories and Reminiscences

THE OCTOBER STORM AND AFTER

Stories and Reminiscences

PROGRESS PUBLISHERS • MOSCOW

РАССКАЗЫ О РЕВОЛЮЦИИ

На английском языке

Translated from the Russian

Designed by V. Kuleshov

First printing 1967

Second printing 1974

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

CONTENTS

10 *Anatoly Lunacharsky.* Smolny on the Night of the Storm

14 *John Reed.* Ten Days That Shook the World. (Extracts)

24 *Vladimir Bonch-Bruyevich.* How Lenin Wrote the Decree on Land

29 *Vladimir Bonch-Bruyevich.* The Arms of the Soviet State

33 *Alexandra Kollontai.* The First Benefit

44 *Mikhail Sholokhov.* The Bastard

82 *Alexander Fadeyev.* Metelitsa Goes on Reconnaissance

102 *Vsevolod Ivanov.* Letter T.

114 *Abdulla Kahhar.* The Healer of the Blind

136 *Vera Inber.* The Crime of Nor Bibi

166 *Valentin Katayev.* Sleep

175 *Boris Lavrenyov.* The Forty First

242 *A. Zorich.* The Insult

262 *Kornei Chukovsky.* People's Commissar for Education

275 *Konstantin Fedin.* Gorky Among Us

296 *Maxim Gorky.* Kamo

309 *Maxim Gorky.* Mitya Pavlov

311 *Yuri German.* A Walk in the Yard

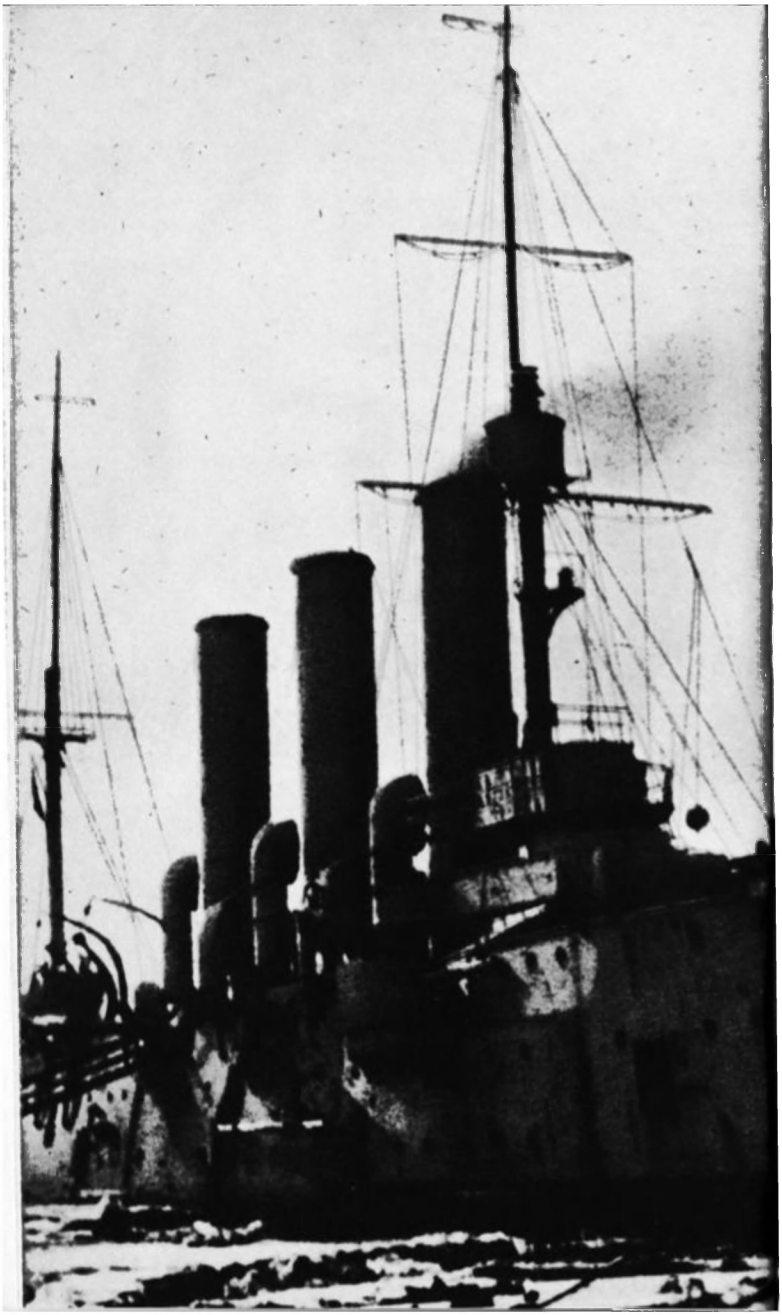
336 *Yelizaveta Drabkina.* Meditation

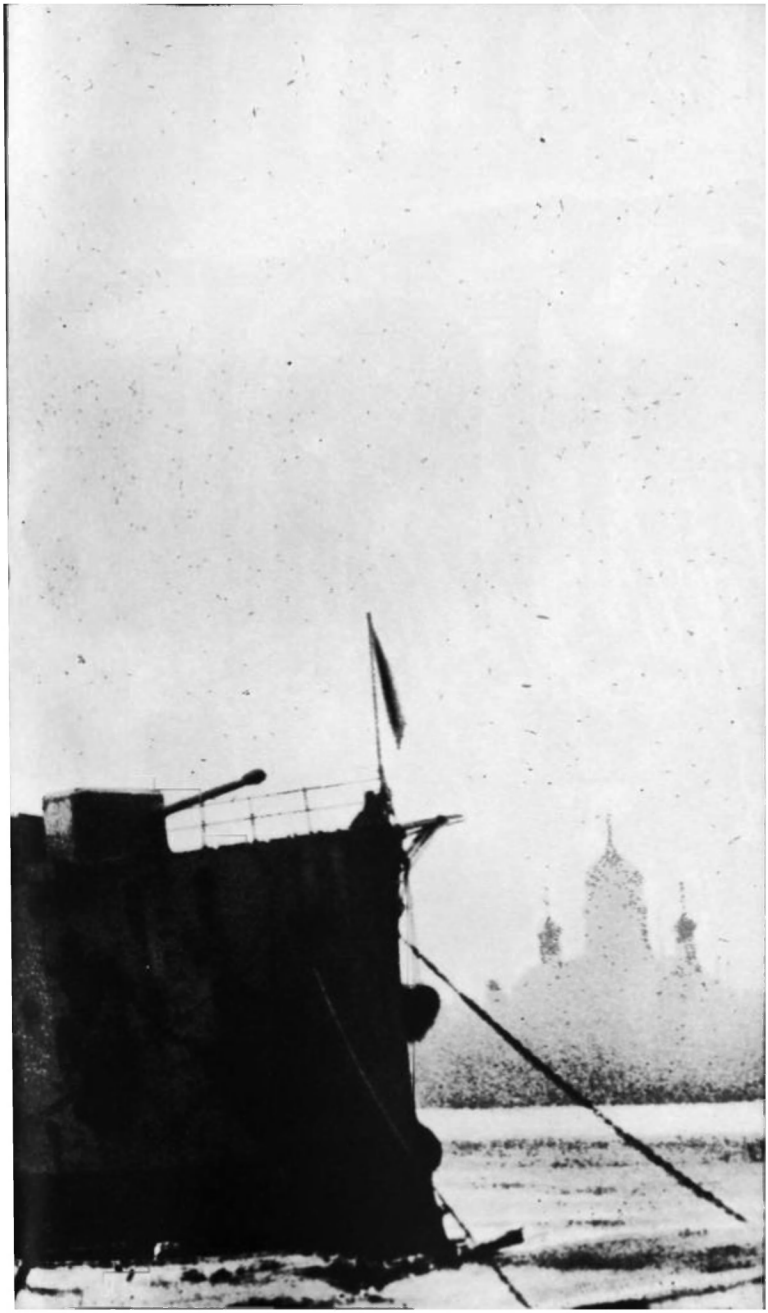
343 *Vera Panova.* Three Boys at the Gate

V. I. Lenin

The cruiser "Aurora", a shot from which signalled the start of the October Revolution. This picture was taken in April 1918

Red Guards





ANATOLY LUNACHARSKY

Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875-1933) joined a Social-Democratic organisation in 1892, when he was 17 years old; he later contributed to the Bolshevik newspapers *Uperyod* and *Proletary* under Lenin's guidance. For many years after the October Revolution he was People's Commissar for Education of the R.S.F.S.R.

A brilliant speaker and journalist, a student of literature, he was the author of several plays and some penetrating studies in Soviet writing. Lenin had a very high opinion of Lunacharsky.

SMOLNY ON THE NIGHT OF THE STORM

Smolny* was brightly lit from top to bottom. Crowds of excited people were hurrying back and forth along its many corridors. There was great animation everywhere, but the most impetuous human stream, a real flood of impassioned people, was the one that made its way towards the end of the corridor on the top floor, where, in the most remote back room of all, the Military Revolutionary Committee was in session. The girls in the outer room, worn out though they were, struggled heroically to deal with the unbelievable crush of people who came for explanations and instructions or with all sorts of requests and complaints.

Once you got caught up in this human maelstrom you found yourself surrounded by faces flushed with excitement and hands outstretched to receive some order or some mandate.

Instructions were given and appointments made there on the spot, all of them of the utmost importance; they were rapidly dictated to typists whose machines never ceased their clatter, were signed in pencil on an official's knee, and in a few minutes some young comrade, happy to have been entrusted with a task, would be racing through the night in a car driven at breakneck speed. In the room right at the back, several comrades sat at a table constantly telegraphing in all directions, to the insurgent towns of Russia, orders that were as electrical in their effect as the means by which they were sent

I still recall in wonder the amazing amount of

* The Smolny Institute had been a school for the daughters of gentlefolk before the revolution. In 1917 it was taken over as the headquarters of the Petrograd Soviet, and various political parties, including the Bolsheviks, had their offices there.—*Ed.*

work done there and consider the activities of the Military Revolutionary Committee at the time of the October Revolution to be one of those manifestations of human energy that demonstrate the inexhaustible reserves stored up in the heart of a revolutionary, and what that heart is capable of when aroused by the thunderous voice of the revolution.

The Second Congress of Soviets opened in the White Hall of the Smolny Institute that evening.

The deputies were in a triumphant, festive mood. There was tremendous excitement, but not the slightest sign of panic although fighting was going on round the Winter Palace and at times news of a most alarming nature was brought in.

When I say there was no panic I am referring to the Bolsheviks and the overwhelming majority of the Congress that was on their side. The malicious, confused, nervous Right "socialist" elements, on the contrary, were seized with panic.

When the session at last began, the mood of the Congress became quite clear. The speeches of the Bolsheviks were received with tremendous enthusiasm. The dashing young sailors who came to tell the truth about the fighting then going on around the Winter Palace were listened to in admiration.

What a never-ending storm of applause greeted the long-awaited news that the Soviets had, at last, captured the Winter Palace, and that the capitalist Ministers had been arrested! In the meantime a Menshevik, Lieutenant Kuchin, a man who at that time played an important part in the army organisation, got up on the rostrum and threatened to bring soldiers from his front to Petrograd immediately. He read out resolutions against Soviet power from the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and so on up to the 12th Army (including a Special Army) and ended with a direct threat to Petrograd that had dared risk "such an adventure".

His words did not frighten anyone. Nor was anyone frightened by the announcement that the whole sea of peasants would turn against us and swallow us up.

Lenin was in his element; he was happy, he worked without let-up, and in some far corner he wrote those decrees of the new government that were, as we know now, to become the most famous pages in the history of our age.

Let me add to these few scanty lines my reminiscences of the way the first Council of People's Commissars was formed. It took place in a little room in Smolny, where the chairs were hidden under the hats and coats thrown on to them, and everybody crowded round a badly lit table. We were then choosing the leaders of regenerated Russia. It seemed to me that the selection was often too casual and I was afraid that the people chosen, whom I knew well and who did not seem to me to have the training for the various specialities, were not up to the gigantic tasks ahead. Lenin waved me aside with a gesture of annoyance but at the same time smiled.

"That's for the time being," he said, "then we'll see. We need people of responsibility for all posts; if they prove unsuitable we'll change them."

How right he was! Some, of course, were replaced, others retained their posts. And how many there were who, though they began timidly, later proved fully capable of their assignments! Some people, of course (even some of those who had taken part in the insurrection and had not been mere onlookers), grew dizzy in face of tremendous prospects and of difficulties that seemed insurmountable. With amazing mental composure Lenin studied the way tasks had to be done and took them in hand in the same way as an experienced pilot takes over the wheel of a giant ocean liner.

Translated by George H. Hanna

JOHN REED

John Reed (1887-1920), American journalist and writer, eyewitness of the October events in Russia, published his *Ten Days That Shook the World* in 1919. In his Preface to John Reed's book Lenin wrote (in English), "With the greatest interest and with never slackening attention I read John Reed's book, *Ten Days That Shook the World.* Unreservedly do I recommend it to the workers of the world. Here is a book which I should like to see published in millions of copies and translated into all languages. It gives a truthful and most vivid exposition of the events so significant to the comprehension of what really is the Proletarian Revolution and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat." Here we give two short excerpts from John Reed's book.

TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD
(Excerpts)

It was just 8.40 when a thundering wave of cheers announced the entrance of the presidium,* with Lenin—great Lenin—among them. A short, stocky figure, with a big head set down on his shoulders, bald and bulging. Little eyes, a snubbish nose, wide generous mouth, and heavy chin; clean-shaven now but already beginning to bristle with the well-known beard of his past and future. Dressed in shabby clothes, his trousers much too long for him. Unimpressive, to be the idol of a mob, loved and revered as perhaps few leaders in history have been. A strange popular leader—a leader purely by virtue of intellect; colourless, humourless, uncompromising and detached, without picturesque idiosyncrasies—but with the power of explaining profound ideas in simple terms, of analysing a concrete situation. And combined with shrewdness, the greatest intellectual audacity....

Now Lenin, gripping the edge of the reading stand, letting his little winking eyes travel over the crowd as he stood there waiting, apparently oblivious to the long-rolling ovation, which lasted several minutes. When it finished, he said simply, "We shall now proceed to construct the Socialist order!" Again that overwhelming human roar.

"The first thing is the adoption of practical measures to realise peace.... We shall offer peace to the peoples of all the belligerent countries upon the basis of the Soviet terms—no annexations, no indemnities, and the right to self-determination of peoples. At the same time, according to our promise,

* This refers to the presidium of the Second Session, Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets, held November 8, 1917.—*Ed.*

we shall publish and repudiate the secret treaties.... The question of War and Peace is so clear that I think that I may, without preamble, read the project of a Proclamation to the Peoples of All the Belligerent Countries...."

His great mouth, seeming to smile, opened wide as he spoke; his voice was hoarse—not unpleasantly so, but as if it had hardened that way after years and years of speaking—and went on monotonously, with the effect of being able to go on for ever.... For emphasis he bent forward slightly. No gestures. And before him, a thousand simple faces looking up in intent adoration.

PROCLAMATION TO THE PEOPLES AND GOVERNMENTS OF ALL THE BELLIGERENT NATIONS

"The Workers' and Peasants' Government, created by the revolution of November 6th and 7th and based on the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies, proposes to all the belligerent peoples and to their Governments to begin immediately negotiations for a just and democratic peace.

"The Government means by a just and democratic peace, which is desired by the majority of the workers and the labouring classes, exhausted and depleted by the war—that peace which the Russian workers and peasants, after having struck down the Tsarist monarchy, have not ceased to demand categorically—immediate peace without annexations (that is to say without conquest of foreign territory, without forcible annexation of other nationalities), and without indemnities.

"The Government of Russia proposes to all the belligerent peoples immediately to conclude such a peace, by showing themselves willing to enter upon decisive steps of negotiations aiming at such a peace, at once, without the slightest delay, before the

definitive ratification of all the conditions of such a peace by the authorised assemblies of the people of all countries and of all nationalities. . . ."

It was exactly 10.35 when Kameniev asked all in favour of the proclamation to hold up their cards. One delegate dared to raise his hand against, but the sudden outburst around him brought it swiftly down. . . . Unanimous.

Suddenly, by common impulse, we found ourselves on our feet, mumbling together into the smooth lifting unison of the *Internationale*. A grizzled old soldier was sobbing like a child. Alexandra Kollontai rapidly winked the tears back. The immense sound rolled through the hall, burst windows and doors and soared into the quiet sky. "The war is ended! The war is ended!" said a young workman near me, his face shining. And when it was over, as we stood there in a kind of awkward hush, someone in the back of the room shouted, "Comrades! Let us remember those who have died for liberty!" So we began to sing the Funeral March, that slow, melancholy and yet triumphant chant, so Russian and so moving. The *Internationale* is an alien air, after all. The Funeral March seemed the very soul of those dark masses whose delegates sat in this hall, building from their obscure visions a new Russia—and perhaps more.

You fell in the fatal fight
For the liberty of the people, for the honour of the people,
You gave up your lives and everything dear to you,
You suffered in horrible prisons,
You went to exile in chains. . . .
Without a word you carried your chains because you could not ignore your suffering brothers,
Because you believed that justice is stronger than the sword. . . .

The time will come when your surrendered life
will count.
That time is near; when tyranny falls the people
will rise, great and free!
Farewell, brothers, you chose a noble path,
At your grave we swear to fight, to work for
freedom and the people's happiness....

For this did they lie there, the martyrs of March,* in their cold Brotherhood Grave on Mars Field; for this thousands and tens of thousands had died in the prisons, in exile, in Siberian mines. It had not come as they expected it would come, nor as the intelligentsia desired it; but it had come—rough, strong, impatient of formulas, contemptuous of sentimentalism; *real*....

The door of the great Mikhailovsky Riding-School yawned blackly. Two sentinels tried to stop us, but we brushed by hurriedly, deaf to their indignant expostulations. Inside only a single arc lamp burned dimly, high up near the roof of the enormous hall, whose forty pilasters and rows of windows vanished in the gloom. Around dimly squatted the monstrous shapes of the armoured cars. One stood alone in the centre of the place, under the light, and round it were gathered some two thousand dun-coloured soldiers, almost lost in the immensity of that imperial building. A dozen men, officers, chairmen of the Soldiers' Committees and speakers, were perched on top of the car, and from the central turret a soldier was speaking. This was Khanjunov, who had been president of last summer's all-Russian Congress of *Bronneviki*. A lithe, handsome figure in his leather coat with lieutenant's shoulder-straps, he stood, pleading eloquently for neutrality.

* February (O.S.) revolution.—*Ed.*

"It is an awful thing," he said, "for Russians to kill their Russian brothers. There must not be civil war between soldiers who stood shoulder to shoulder against the Tsar, and conquered the foreign enemy in battles which will go down in history! What have we, soldiers, got to do with these squabbles of political parties? I will not say to you that the Provisional Government was a democratic Government; we want no coalition with the bourgeoisie—no. But we must have a Government of the united democracy, or Russia is lost! With such a Government there will be no need for civil war, and the killing of brother by brother!"

This sounded reasonable—the great hall echoed to the crash of hands and voices.

A soldier climbed up, his face white and strained. "Comrades!" he cried, "I come from the Rumanian front, to urgently tell you all: there must be peace! Peace at once! Whoever can give us peace, whether it be the Bolsheviki or this new Government, we will follow. Peace! We at the front cannot fight any longer. We cannot fight either Germans or Russians—" With that he leaped down, and a sort of confused agonised sound rose up from all that surging mass, which burst into something like anger when the next speaker, a Menshevik *oboronetz*,* tried to say that the war must go on until the Allies were victorious.

"You talk like Kerensky!" shouted a rough voice.

A Duma delegate, pleading for neutrality. Him they listened to, muttering uneasily, feeling him not one of them. Never have I seen men trying so hard to understand, to decide. They never moved, stood staring with a sort of terrible intentness at the speaker, their brows wrinkled with the effort of

* Menshevik defencists—supporters of the imperialist policy of the Provisional Government.—*Ed.*

thought, sweat standing out on their foreheads; great giants of men with the innocent clear eyes of children, and the faces of epic warriors....

Now a Bolshevik was speaking, one of their own men, violently, full of hate. They liked him no more than the other. It was not their mood. For the moment they were lifted out of the ordinary run of common thoughts, thinking in terms of Russia, of Socialism, the world, as if it depended on them whether the Revolution were to live or die....

Speaker succeeded speaker, debating amid tense silence, roars of approval, or anger: should we come out or not? Khanjunov returned, persuasive and sympathetic. But wasn't he an officer, and an *oboronetz*, however much he talked of peace? Then a workman from Vasili Ostrov, but him they greeted with, "And are *you* going to give us peace, workingman?" Near us some men, many of them officers, formed a sort of *claque* to cheer the advocates of Neutrality. They kept shouting, "Khanjunov! Khanjunov!" and whistled insultingly when the Bolsheviki tried to speak.

Suddenly the committeemen and officers on top of the automobile began to discuss something with great heat and much gesticulation. The audience shouted to know what was the matter, and all the great mass tossed and stirred. A soldier, held back by one of the officers, wrenched himself loose and held up his hand.

"Comrades!" he cried, "Comrade Krylenko is here and wants to speak to us." An outburst of cheers, whistlings, yells of "*Prosim*! *Prosim*! *Doloi*! Go ahead! Go ahead! Down with him!" in the midst of which the People's Commissar for Military Affairs clambered up the side of the car, helped by hands before and behind, pushed and pulled from below and above. Rising he stood for a moment, and then walked out on the radiator. put his hands on his

hips and looked around smiling, a squat, short-legged figure, bare-headed, without insignia on his uniform.

The *claque* near me kept up a fearful shouting. "Khanjunov! We want Khanjunov! Down with him! Shut up! Down with the traitor!" The whole place seethed and roared. Then it began to move like an avalanche bearing down upon us, great black-browed men forcing their way through.

"Who is breaking up our meeting?" they shouted. "Who is whistling here?" The *claque*, rudely burst asunder, went flying—nor did they gather again....

"Comrade soldiers!" began Krylenko, in a voice husky with fatigue. "I cannot speak well to you; I am sorry; but I have not had any sleep for four nights....

"I don't need to tell you that I am a soldier. I don't need to tell you that I want peace. What I must say is that the Bolshevik Party, successful in the Workers' and Soldiers' Revolution, by the help of you and of all the rest of the brave comrades who have hurled down for ever the power of the blood-thirsty bourgeoisie, promised to offer peace to all the peoples, and that has already been done—to-day!" Tumultuous applause.

"You are asked to remain neutral—to remain neutral while the *yunkers** and the Death Battalions, who are *never* neutral, shoot us down in the streets and bring back to Petrograd Kerensky—or perhaps some other of the gang. Kaledin is marching from the Don. Kerensky is coming from the front. Kornilov is raising the *Tekhintsi* to repeat his attempt of August. All these Mensheviki and Socialist Revolutionaries who call upon you now to prevent civil war—how have they retained the power except by civil war, that civil war which has endured ever

* Military cadets.—*Tr.*

since July, and in which they constantly stood on the side of the bourgeoisie, as they do now?

"How can I persuade you, if you made up your minds? The question is very plain. On one side are Kerensky, Kaledin, Kornilov, the Mensheviki, Socialist Revolutionaries, Cadets, Dumas, officers.... They tell us that their objects are good. On the other side are the workers, the soldiers and sailors, the poorest peasants. The Government is in your hands. You are the masters. Great Russia belongs to you. Will you give it back?"

While he spoke he kept himself up by sheer evident effort of will, and as he went on the deep sincere feeling back of his words broke through the tired voice. At the end he tottered, almost falling; a hundred hands reached up to help him down, and the great dim spaces of the hall gave back the surf of sound that beat upon him.

Khanjunov tried to speak again, but "Vote! Vote! Vote!" they cried. At length, giving in, he read the resolution: that the *bronneviki* withdraw their representative from the Military Revolutionary Committee, and declare their neutrality in the present civil war. All those in favour should go to the right, those opposed, to the left. There was a moment of hesitation, a still expectancy, and then the crowd began to surge faster and faster, stumbling over one another, to the left, hundreds of big soldiers, in a solid mass rushing across the dirt floor in the faint light.... Near us about fifty men were left stranded, stubbornly in favour, and even as the high roof shook under the shock of victorious roaring, they turned and rapidly walked out of the building—and, some of them, out of the Revolution....

Imagine this struggle being repeated in every barracks of the city, the district, the whole front, all Russia. Imagine the sleepless Krylenkos, watching

the regiments, hurrying from place to place, arguing, threatening, entreating. And then imagine the same in all the locals of every labour union, in the factories, the villages, on the battle-ships of the far-flung Russian fleets; think of the hundreds of thousands of Russian men staring up at speakers all over the vast country, workmen, peasants, soldiers, sailors, trying so hard to understand and to choose, thinking so intensively—and deciding so unanimously at the end. So was the Russian Revolution. .

VLADIMIR BONCH-BRUYEVICH

Vladimir Bonch-Bruyevich (1873-1955) was one of the oldest members of the Communist Party who took an active part in the February and October revolutions. He was closely acquainted with Lenin and worked with him for many years. From the first days of the October Revolution until 1920 he was the Executive Secretary of the Council of People's Commissars. He later became the chief editor of the *Zhizn i Znaniye* (Life and Knowledge) State Publishing House and the organiser and director of the State Literary Museum. He was the author of many essays on the revolutionary movement in Russia, and of a number of literary studies and articles on ethnography.

HOW LENIN WROTE THE DECREE ON LAND

Once the Bolshevik revolutionary forces had captured the Winter Palace, Lenin, who had been greatly disturbed at our military leaders' slowness in taking action, was at last able to breathe freely; he removed his simple disguise and, accompanied by political friends of long standing, made his way to where the session of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies was awaiting the consummation of the revolutionary events.

"Thunderous applause" does not describe what happened when Lenin mounted the rostrum—it was much more than that, it was a truly colossal whirlwind of human feelings that swept through the hall. The meeting opened. Again shouts of greeting, slogans, jubilation. . . . And so that remarkable, historic meeting continued, stormy and enthusiastic to the end.

When, at last, the business for the evening had been done, we went to my apartment to spend the night. We supped off what we could find and after supper I did my best to ensure Vladimir Ilyich a good night's rest; although he was excited he was obviously greatly overtired. With difficulty I persuaded him to take my bed in a separate room where there was a desk, paper, ink and a library at his disposal.

I lay down on a sofa in the adjoining room, determined to stay awake until I was quite sure that Vladimir Ilyich was sleeping. For greater security I fastened all the locks, bolts and bars on the street door, loaded my revolvers, thinking there might be an attempt to break in and arrest or kill Vladimir Ilyich, for this was only our first night in power and anything was to be expected.

In case of emergency I made a list on a separate sheet of paper of the telephone numbers of all the comrades I knew, of Smolny, and of workers' and trade union committees, so that I should not forget them in a moment of urgency.

Vladimir Ilyich had by that time switched off the light in his room. I listened but did not hear a sound. I was just dozing off, and in another moment I should have been asleep, when the light suddenly flashed on in his room. I heard him leave his bed almost soundlessly, quietly open the door to satisfy himself that I was "asleep" (which, of course, I was not) and then go on tiptoe to the desk so as not to waken anyone; he sat down at the desk, opened the inkpot, spread out some papers and got down to work.

He wrote, crossed out, read, made notes, started writing again and then, at last, appeared to be rewriting the whole thing in a fair copy. It had begun to grow light, and the Petrograd late autumn dawn was tinging the sky with grey when Vladimir Ilyich at last put the light out and went to bed.

When it was time to get up next morning I asked everybody in the house to keep quiet, telling them that Vladimir Ilyich had been working all night and was no doubt tired out. Suddenly, long before anyone expected to see him, the door opened and he came out of his room fully dressed, energetic, fresh, happy and full of life and good humour.

"I congratulate you on the first day of the socialist revolution," he said in greeting to us all; not a trace of weariness could be seen on his face, he seemed to have had a good night's rest although actually he could not have slept for more than two or three hours after a hectic twenty-hour day. When we sat down to breakfast Nadezhda Krupskaya, who had also spent the night at our house, came out of her room and Vladimir Ilyich pulled his famous Decree on Land out of his pocket.

"The thing now is to announce this, to publish it and ensure its distribution. Then let them try to take it back! Not likely—why, there is no power on earth that could take that decree away from the peasants and return the land to its former owners. This is one of the most important gains of our revolution. The agrarian revolution will be carried out and consolidated this very day."

When somebody told him that in the provinces there would still be much confusion and conflict over the land, he immediately retorted that that was not important, that things would settle themselves once this programme had been understood and its significance grasped. Then he began to tell us in detail that the decree would be particularly welcomed by the peasants because it was based on the demands of all peasant conferences as expressed by their delegations to the Congress of Soviets.

"Yes, but these were the demands put forward by the Socialist-Revolutionaries and they'll say that we borrowed them from them," someone remarked.

Vladimir Ilyich smiled.

"Let them say it. The peasants will understand clearly that we shall always support their just demands. We must get properly in touch with the peasants, with their way of life and their aspirations. And if there are fools that laugh at us, let them laugh. We never did intend to give the Socialist-Revolutionaries a monopoly of the peasantry. We are the chief government party and after the dictatorship of the proletariat the peasant question comes next in importance."

The Decree on Land had to be announced at the Congress on the evening of that same day. It was decided to have it typed out immediately and sent to press so that it would be published in the newspapers the next day. It was then that Vladimir Ilyich got the idea of giving the Decree wide publicity, of

making the publication of all government communications obligatory for all newspapers.

It was decided to print the Decree on Land immediately as a separate booklet in an edition of no less than 50,000 copies and to distribute it primarily among soldiers returning to the rural areas so that it would become known, through them, to the greatest number of people. That was carried out splendidly within the next few days.

Soon we started out for Smolny on foot and then got on a tram; Vladimir Ilyich beamed when he saw the perfect order maintained in the streets. He waited impatiently for the evening. After the Second All-Russia Congress had adopted the Decree on Peace he read out the Decree on Land in a very clear voice and it was adopted unanimously with great enthusiasm.

As soon as the Decree had been adopted I sent it out by messenger to all Petrograd newspaper offices and to the post office for it to be telegraphed to other towns. Our newspapers had made it up beforehand and in the morning it was read by hundreds of thousands, even millions of people; the working population greeted it enthusiastically. The bourgeoisie howled and raved in all their newspapers. But who paid any attention to them at that time?

Vladimir Ilyich was triumphant.

"That alone," he said, "will leave a mark on our history for many long years."

A period rich in creative revolutionary activity had begun very successfully. Vladimir Ilyich's interest in the Decree lasted a long time and he always wanted to know how many copies of it had been distributed among soldiers and peasants in addition to the newspaper publications of it. It was printed and reprinted many times as a booklet and many copies were sent gratis to even the smallest district centres in Russia.

The Decree on Land really did become universally known; probably no other law has ever been published as widely as that Law on the Land, one of the really fundamental laws of our new, socialist legislation. It was a law to which Vladimir Ilyich devoted much strength and effort and which he regarded as being of tremendous significance.

Translated by George H. Hanna

THE ARMS OF THE SOVIET STATE

The designing of the arms of the Soviet state was a task of outstanding importance since it had to be a coat of arms that differed substantially in its implications from anything that had ever been in the arms of capitalist states.

The office of the Council of People's Commissars received a design for the arms done in water colours. It was round in shape and bore the same emblems as the present coat of arms, but through the centre ran a long, unsheathed sword. The sword seemed to cover the entire design; its hilt rested in the joined sheaves of corn at the base and the blade narrowed to a point in the sun's rays that filled the entire upper part of the ornament.

Vladimir Ilyich was in his office talking to Yakov Sverdlov, Felix Dzerzhinsky and several other comrades when the design was laid on his desk.

"What's that, a coat of arms? . . . Let's have a look at it!" He bent over the desk and peered closely at the drawing. We all stood round Vladimir Ilyich, interested to see this design for a coat of arms that had been sent in by an engraver employed at Goznak, the printing works that produced banknotes.

Outwardly the arms had been well done. The rays of the rising sun, surrounded by a semicircle of sheaves of wheat, gleamed against a red background; the hammer and sickle stood out clearly in this semicircle but the entire design was dominated by the sharpened steel blade that ran right through it from bottom to top, as though to put everyone on his guard.

"Interesting! . . ." exclaimed Vladimir Ilyich. "The idea is there, but what is the sword for?" He turned and looked at us.

"We are battling, we are fighting and will continue to fight until we have consolidated the dictatorship of the proletariat and have driven the Whiteguards and interventionists out of our country, but that does not mean that war, war lords and violence will ever take the lead with us. We do not need any conquests. A policy of conquest is alien to us; we are not attacking but are defending ourselves against internal and external enemies; our war is defensive and the sword is not our emblem. We must hold it firmly to protect our proletarian state as long as we have enemies, as long as we are attacked, as long as we are threatened, but that does not mean for ever. . . .

"Socialism will triumph in all countries, there is no doubt about that. The brotherhood of the peoples will be proclaimed and will become reality throughout the world, and we do not need the sword. It is not our emblem . . ." Vladimir Ilyich repeated.

"We must remove the sword from the arms of our socialist state," Vladimir Ilyich continued. He took a black-lead pencil with a sharp point and made the proof-reader's sign for "delete" over the sword, repeating it in the right-hand margin.

"In other respects the design is a good one. Let us approve the sketch and then we can see it again and discuss it at the Council of People's Commissars; it must be done soon, however. . . ."

And he put his signature to the sketch.

I returned the sketch to the Goznak engraver, who was in the building, and asked him to amend it.

When the sketch was returned without the sword we decided to show it to the sculptor Andreyev. He found it necessary to make some technical corrections, drew it again, made the sheaves of grain thicker, made the gleaming rays of the sun stand

out more clearly and, in general, produced the entire coat of arms in relief, making it more expressive.

The coat of arms of the R.S.F.S.R. was approved at the very beginning of 1918.

Translated by George H. Hanna

ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI

Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952) joined the revolutionary movement in the nineties; she took an active part in the battles of the October Revolution in 1917. She was a close friend of Lenin's.

After the October Revolution she became People's Commissar for Social Security, then secretary of the International Women's Secretariat of the Comintern and, later, Soviet Ambassador to Norway, Mexico and Sweden.

Alexandra Kollontai's reminiscences of the 1917 revolution have been published several times in the U.S.S.R. They provided the writer Daniil Granin with material for his script of the film *The First Visitor*, produced by the Leningrad Studio.

THE FIRST BENEFIT

October 1917 was windy, the sky grey and overcast. The wind thrashed the tops of the trees in the garden of the Smolny Institute, and in the building with the endless maze of passages and its big, light, scantily furnished halls, the work going on was of an intensity such as the world had never before witnessed.

Two days before, power had passed into the hands of the Soviets. The Winter Palace was occupied by workers and soldiers. Kerensky's government no longer existed. We all realised, however, that this was only the first rung of that difficult ladder leading to the emancipation of the working people and to the creation of a new, hitherto unknown, republic of labour.

The Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party was squeezed into a little side room with a plain table in the middle, newspapers on the windows and on the floor, and a few chairs. I do not remember what brought me there, but I do remember that Vladimir Ilyich did not even given me a chance to ask my question. When he saw me he decided immediately that I ought to do something far more useful than I had intended to.

"Go immediately and take over the Ministry of Social Security. That has to be done at once."

Vladimir Ilyich was quite calm, almost merry. He joked about something and then straight away began talking to some other people.

I do not remember why I went there alone; but I remember very well the damp October day when I drove up to the doors of the Ministry of Social Security in Kazanskaya Street. A tall, grey-bearded, impressive-looking porter with lots of gold braid

opened the door and looked me over from head to foot.

"Who's in charge here?" I asked him.

"Reception hours for applicants are over," snapped the important-looking, gold-braided old man.

"I'm not here about any application for aid. Which of the chief clerks are here?"

"I told you in plain Russian—applicants are received from one to three; look, it's past four already."

I insisted and he reiterated his refusal. Nothing was any help. Reception hours were over. He had been ordered not to let anyone in.

I tried to go upstairs despite the prohibition, but the stubborn old man stood like a wall in front of me and would not allow me to take a step forward.

And so I went away empty-handed. I had to hurry to a meeting. In those days meetings were the most important thing, they were basic. There, among the urban poor and the soldiers the question of "to be or not to be" was being decided, whether the workers and peasants in army uniforms would be able to maintain Soviet power or whether the bourgeoisie would gain the upper hand.

Very early the next morning there came a ring at the door of the flat in which I had been staying after my release from Kerensky's prison. It was an insistent ring. The door was opened. There stood a typical peasant—sheepskin coat, bast shoes, beard, all complete.

"Is it here that Kollontai, commissar from the people, lives? I have to see him. I have a note to him from their chief Bolshevik, from Lenin."

I looked at the scrap of paper and saw that it really was written in Lenin's hand.

"Pay him out of the social security fund whatever is due to him for his horse."

In his unhurried, peasant way he told me the whole story. At the time of the tsar, just before the February Revolution, his horse had been requisitioned for war purposes. He had been promised "good value" for his horse. But time passed and there was no sign of any recompense. So the peasant came to Petrograd and for two months had been haunting the institutions of the Provisional Government. No results. The old man was chased here and there, from one office to another, he had no patience and no money left. Then he suddenly heard about some people called Bolsheviks, heard that they were giving back to the workers and peasants everything the tsar and the landowners had taken away from them and everything the people had been robbed of during the war. The only thing you needed was a note from the chief Bolshevik, from Lenin. And our peasant found Vladimir Ilyich in Smolny, woke him up long before dawn and managed to get a note from him. It was this note that he had shown me, but he had no intention of giving it up.

"I'll give it to you when I get the money. In the meantime I'll keep it—that's the surer way."

What was I to do with that peasant and his horse? The ministry was still in the hands of the Provisional Government's civil servants. Those were strange times—power was in the hands of the Soviets, the Council of People's Commissars was a Bolshevik body, but the government institutions continued to run on the political rails of the Provisional Government, like railway coaches running away downhill.

How were we to take over the ministry? By force? The clerks would run away and I would be left without any staff.

We arrived at a different decision. We summoned a delegate meeting of the trade union of junior (technical) employees under the chairmanship of Ivan Yegorov, a mechanic. This was rather a special

trade union. It consisted of people of different trades, of all those who were employed at the ministry in a purely technical capacity—messengers, nurses, stokers, book-keepers, copyists, mechanics, printers and care-takers.

They discussed the situation. They discussed it in a businesslike manner. They elected a council and next morning went to occupy the ministry.

We went in. The porter in gold braid did not sympathise with the Bolsheviks and had not attended the meeting. He disapproved but allowed us to pass. As we went upstairs, we were met by a flood of people coming down—clerks, typists, accountants, heads of departments.... What a hurry they were in! They would not even spare us a glance. We came in and the staff went out. The sabotage by officials of the civil service had begun. Only a few people remained. They said they were prepared to work with us, with the Bolsheviks. We entered the ministerial offices and the general offices. All empty. Typewriters had been abandoned, papers were lying about everywhere. The books had been cleared away. Locked up. And no keys. No keys to the safes, either.

Who had them? How could we work without money? Social security is an institution whose work cannot be held up; it includes orphanages, and disabled soldiers, and artificial limb factories, and hospitals, and sanatoriums, and leper colonies, and reformatories, and girls' institutes, and homes for the blind.... A tremendous field of work! Demands and complaints come in from all sides.... And no keys! The most persistent of all was that peasant with a note from Lenin. Every morning he was at the door by daybreak.

"What about paying me for me horse? A fine animal, it was. If it hadn't been so strong and hard-working I wouldn't have taken so much trouble over getting paid."

Two days later the keys turned up. The first payment made from the social security fund by the People's Commissariat of Social Security was compensation for a horse that the tsarist government had confiscated from a peasant by force and by deception and for which that persistent peasant received payment in full in accordance with his note from Lenin.

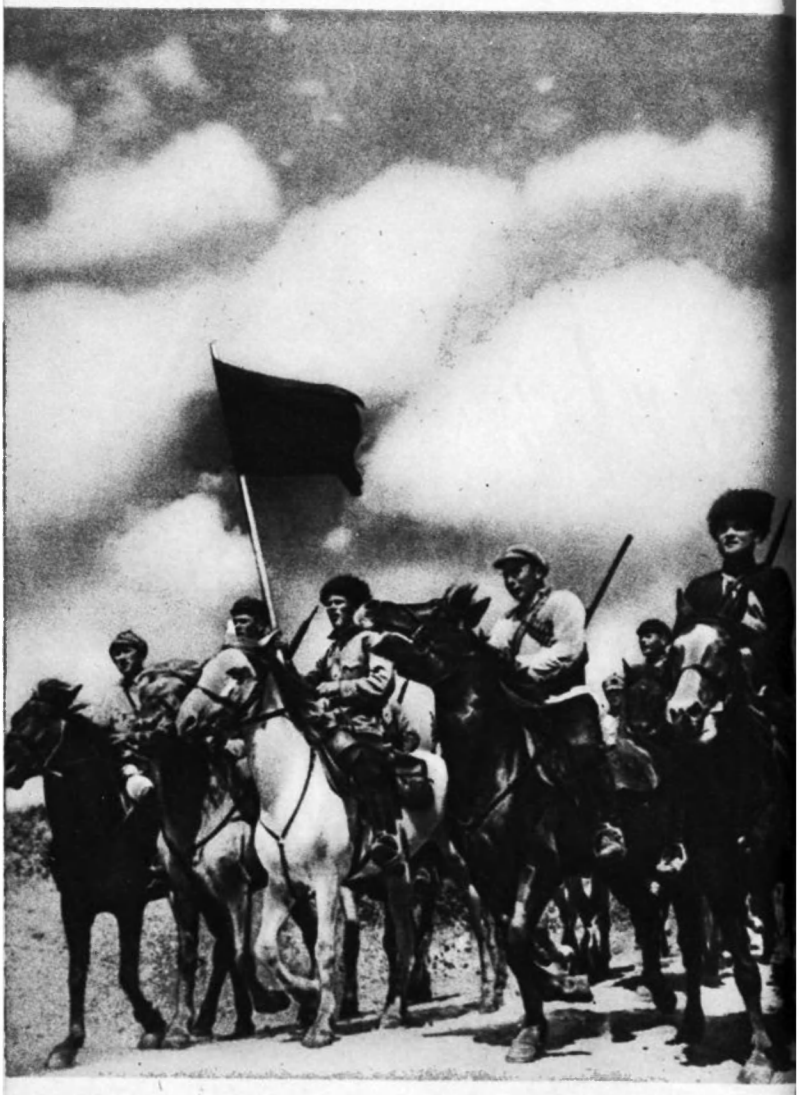
Translated by George H. Hanna

"Have you volunteered?" A Civil War poster by D. Moor, Merited Artist

To the front

The First Cavalry Army

ТЫ
ЗАПИСАЛСЯ
ДОБРОВОЛЬЦЕМ?



MIKHAIL SHOLOKHOV

The *Tales of the Don*, of which this story is one, were written in the twenties, at the beginning of Mikhail Sholokhov's career as a writer, and even at that early stage showed their author to be the great artist we were to know later from *And Quiet Flows the Don*, *Virgin Soil Upturned* and *The Fate of a Man*.

"Sholokhov's stories stand out like a flower in the steppe," wrote Alexander Serafimovich as far back as 1926. "They are simple and vivid and you feel every word of them—they live before your eyes. Their language is the colourful language of the Cossacks. Everything is compressed, but they are full of life, intensity and truthfulness."

Misha dreamed that Grandad was coming towards him, angrily swinging a long cherry switch he had cut in the orchard.

"Come along, come along, Mikhailo Fomich," Grandad said sternly. "You've got a good hiding due to you."

"What for, Grandaddy?"

"For stealing all the eggs out of the tufted hen's nest to pay for the merry-go-round."

"But Grandaddy," Misha protested desperately, "I never went near the merry-go-round all summer."

But Grandad only smoothed his beard, and stamped his foot, and said,

"Come along, you scamp. And let your pants down."

Misha cried out in his sleep, and that woke him. His heart was thumping as if he'd really had a taste of the switch. He opened one eye, just wide enough to peep around him. It was already light. Outside the window spread the warm glow of dawn. Out in the entrance voices sounded. Misha lifted his head. He could hear his Mother's voice, shrill, excited, and half choked with laughter. And Grandad kept coughing. There was someone else there, too, someone with a booming voice.

Misha rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. The outside door opened and shut. Grandad came trotting into the room, his spectacles bobbing up and down. For a minute Misha thought the priest must have come, with the choristers, because Grandad had fussed around just that way when they'd come at Easter. But it wasn't the priest that came pushing into the room behind Grandad. It was a stranger, a great big soldier in a black greatcoat and a rib-

boned cap with no peak. And Mother with her arms around his neck, squealing with excitement.

The man shook Mother off, and yelled out, "Where's my offspring?"

Misha was scared, and hid under the blanket.

"Minyushka," Mother called, "wake up, Sonny. Here's your Daddy, back from the wars."

And before Misha knew it the soldier had pulled him out of bed and thrown him up as high as the ceiling, and caught him again, and pressed him close, poking that prickly red moustache of his at Misha's lips, and cheeks, and eyes. It was wet, too, that moustache, and it tasted of salt. Misha tried to wriggle free, but that didn't work.

"What a fine big Bolshevik I've got me," Daddy roared. "The boy will soon outgrow his Dad! Ha, ha!"

He couldn't stop playing with Misha. One minute he'd sit the boy on his palm and twirl him like a baby, and the next throw him up again as high as the ceiling beams.

Misha stood it as long as he could. But finally he made a stern face, pulling his eyebrows together the way Grandad did, and grabbed his father's moustache in both hands.

"Put me down, Daddy."

"Oh, no, I won't."

"Put me down. I'm no baby for you to play around with."

Daddy sat down, and set Misha on his knee.

"How old are you, then, big boy?" he asked, smiling.

"Getting on for eight," Misha answered sullenly.

"Well, and do you remember, Sonny, those steamboats I made for you, the year before last? And how we floated them in the pond?"

"I remember," Misha cried, and his arms went timidly up around his father's neck.

And that was when the fun began. With Misha riding pickaback on his shoulders, Daddy pranced round and round the room, kicking out suddenly and neighing, just like a real horse. Misha could hardly catch his breath, it was all so exciting. Only Mother kept pulling at his sleeve.

"Misha!" she cried. "Go and play in the yard. Clear out, I tell you, you young rascal."

She pestered Daddy, too.

"Put the boy down, Foma. Do put him down. Let me have my fill of you, my own dear love! Two whole years we've been apart, and you spend your time playing with the child!"

Daddy set Misha down.

"Run and play with the boys awhile," he said, "and later on I'll show you what I've brought you."

Misha's first impulse, as he shut the door behind him, was to stay right there in the entrance and listen in on what the grown-ups were talking about. But then it occurred to him that not one of the village youngsters knew his Dad was back. And off he went, across the yard and straight through the kitchen garden, trampling through the potato plants, and down to the pond.

He splashed about a while in the evil-smelling, stagnant water, then rolled in the sand until he was coated with it, and took a last dip in the pond. Hopping first on one foot, then on the other, he got into his trousers. As he was thinking of starting for home, Vitya came along—the priest's youngster.

"Don't go, Misha. Let's have a dip, and then come to my place to play. Mother says you can come."

With his left hand, Misha hoisted his trousers up and adjusted the only remaining strap of his braces over his shoulder.

"I don't want to play with you," he said. "Your ears stink."

"That's the scrofula," Vitya said, pulling his knitted shirt off over his skinny shoulders. And maliciously screwing up one eye, he went on, "And you're no Cossack. Your mother got you in the gutter."

"A lot you know about it!"

"I heard our cook telling my mother."

Misha's bare toes dug into the sand.

"Your mother's a liar," he declared, looking down at Vitya from his superior height. "And anyway, my Daddy fought in the war, and your Dad's a bloodsucker, gobbling other people's bread."

"And you're a bastard," the priest's boy retorted, on the verge of tears.

Misha stooped and picked up a big smooth pebble. But the priest's boy, controlling his tears, gave him a honey-sweet smile.

"Don't get mad, now, Misha," he said. "There's no sense in fighting. I'll give you my dagger, if you want it, that I made out of a piece of iron."

Misha's eyes gleamed, and he threw away his pebble. But then he remembered Daddy and retorted scornfully.

"My Daddy brought one home from the wars. It's far better than yours."

"You're making it up," Vitya drawled, unconvinced.

"Making it up yourself! If I say he did, that means he did. And a good gun, too."

"Umph! Rich, ain't you!" Vitya snorted, with a wry, envious grin.

"And he's got a cap with ribbons on it, and gold letters on the ribbon like in those books of yours."

It took Vitya some minutes to think up an answer to that. His forehead went all wrinkly, and he scratched absently at the white skin of his belly.

"My Daddy is going to be a bishop, one of these

days," he said finally. "And your Dad's nothing but a herdsman. There!"

But Misha was tired of standing there, arguing. He turned away and made for home.

"Misha! Misha!" the priest's boy called after him. "I've got something to tell you."

"Go on then."

"Come nearer."

Misha came nearer, his eyes screwed up suspiciously.

"Well, what is it?"

Dancing around in the sand on his skinny bow-legs, the priest's boy cried, with a gloating smile,

"Your Dad's a Commie. And the minute you die, and your soul flies up to heaven, God will say to you, 'Your Dad was a Communist, so you must go straight down to Hell.' And down there, the devils will roast you in their frying-pans."

"Well, and they'll roast you too."

"My Daddy's a priest. Ah, you're just an ignorant fool. What's the sense of talking to you?"

That frightened Misha. Silently, he turned and ran for home.

By the fence he looked back and shook his fist at the priest's boy.

"I'm going to ask my Grandaddy. If you've been lying, you'd better keep away from our yard."

He climbed the fence and ran for the house. He could just imagine that frying-pan, with him, Misha, frying in it. Scorching hot, and the sour cream bubbling and foaming all around him. A shiver went down his back. He must find Grandad, quick, and ask him all about it.

Just then he saw the sow. It had got its head stuck through the wicket gate and all the rest of it was outside. It was pushing with all its might, waggling its little tail and squealing desperately. Misha flew to the rescue. But when he tried to open

the gate, the sow began to wheeze. So he climbed on its back, and then, with a final effort, the animal tore the gate off its hinges and made off across the yard as fast as it could go. Misha dug his heels into its sides, and it carried him along so fast that his hair streamed in the wind. By the threshing-floor he jumped off. And when he looked around, there was Grandad, on the house porch, beckoning.

"Come here, young man!"

It never occurred to Misha what Grandad was after. The vision of the frying-pan filled his mind again, and he ran straight to the porch.

"Grandaddy, Grandaddy, do they have devils in Heaven?"

"I'll show you where they have devils. Just you wait. A proper whipping—that's what you want, you little scamp! What do you mean, riding horseback on the sow?"

Grandad grabbed Misha by the forelock, so he couldn't make off, and called into the house to Mother, "Come, have a look at this smart son you've reared."

And out came Mother.

"What's he been up to now?"

"Why, what's he been up to but riding around the yard astride the sow, raising the dust behind him!"

"The sow that's due to litter?"

Mother's hands flew up in horror.

Before Misha could so much as say a word in self-defence, Grandad had undone his belt and, holding up his trousers with one hand, pushed Misha's head between his knees with the other. He gave Misha a thorough strapping, to the stern refrain of, "Don't ride that sow again. Don't ride that sow."

Misha began to bawl, but Grandad quickly put a stop to that.

"Is that how you love your father, you young

brat? Here he's just come home, all tired out, and trying to sleep, and you raise such a howl!"

So Misha had to keep quiet. He aimed a kick at Grandad, but couldn't reach far enough. Then Mother grabbed him and pushed him indoors.

"Sit still, child of a hundred devils! If I take my hand to you, I won't be as soft as Grandad."

Grandad sat on the kitchen bench, glancing now and again at Misha who stood with his face to the wall.

Misha swung around rubbing away one last tear with his fist.

"Just you wait, Grandaddy," he said, his back pressed to the door.

"Threatening your Grandad, are you?"

Grandad started to undo his belt again. Misha pushed against the door until it swung a little open.

"Threatening me, are you?" Grandad repeated.

Misha disappeared outside the door. But he peeped in again, on the alert for Grandad's slightest movement, and shouted, "Just you wait, Grandaddy. When all your teeth are gone don't ask me to chew for you, because I won't."

Grandad came out on the porch just in time to see Misha's head and his blue trousers flash in shaggy hemp in the garden. The old man shook his stick menacingly, but his lips, in the shelter of his beard, were smiling.

* * *

Father called him Minka. Mother called him Minyushka. Grandad, when peacefully inclined, called him a scamp; but at other times, when Grandad's bushy grey eyebrows drew together in a frown, it would be, "Come here, Mikhailo Fomich. Your ears want pulling."

Everyone else—gossipy neighbours, children, the

whole village—called him Mishka when they didn't call him Bastard.

Mother had borne him out of wedlock. True, she had been married to his father, herdsman Foma, only a month later. But the bitter nickname, Bastard, stuck to Misha for life.

Misha was a smallish child. His hair, in early spring the colour of sunflower petals, had been bleached by the June sun into a rough, streaky mop. His cheeks were freckled like a sparrow's egg, and his nose was always peeling from exposure to the sun and frequent dips in the pond. He had only one good point, this bow-legged little Misha: his eyes, blue and mischievous, peeping out of their narrow slits like bits of half-thawed river ice.

It was for those eyes that Misha's father loved him, yes, and for his active, restless temperament. From the wars, Dad had brought his son home a honey cake, stone-hard with age, and a pair of slightly worn top-boots. Mother wrapped the boots in a towel and put them away in the chest, and as for the cake, Misha pounded it with a hammer, that very evening, and ate it to the very last crumb.

Next morning Misha woke at sunrise. He scooped a bit of tepid water from the pot, smeared his grimy face with it, and ran out of doors to dry.

Mother was in the yard, busy with the cow. Grandad, sitting on the earth bank which surrounded the house, beckoned to Misha.

"Dive under the barn, little scamp. I heard a hen clucking in there. It must have laid an egg."

Oh, Misha was always ready to oblige his Grandad. He crawled under the barn, crawled out on the other side, and off he ran, kicking up his heels, through the kitchen garden—glancing back now and then to see if Grandad was watching. By the time he got to the fence, his legs were all stung up by nettles. Grandad waited and waited, until he lost

patience and crawled under the barn himself. He got all smeared with chicken droppings, and half blind in the damp darkness, bumped his head painfully against all the floor beams before he got through to the other side.

"Aren't you stupid, Misha, searching all this time for one little egg! As if a hen would lay anything out there! Right by this stone, that egg ought to be. Misha! Where are you, anyway?"

Grandad got no answer. Brushing the dirt from his trousers, he crept out from under the barn and peered towards the pond. Sure enough, Misha was there. He shrugged and turned away.

By the pond, the village youngsters were crowding around Misha.

"Where was your Dad?" someone asked. "At the wars?"

"That's right."

"Doing what?"

"Fighting—what else?"

"Come off it. All he fought was lice. And the rest of the time he sat by the kitchen door, gnawing bones."

The youngsters screamed with laughter, hopping up and down and pointing at Misha. Tears of bitter resentment filled Misha's eyes. And to top it all, Vitya, the priest's boy, had a dig at him.

"Your Dad's a Communist, ain't he?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I know. He's a Communist. He sold his soul to the Devil, that's what my Daddy told me this morning. Yes, and pretty soon all the Communists are going to be strung up."

A hush fell over the youngsters. Fear clutched at Misha's heart. His Dad strung up? For what crime? Through clenched teeth, he retorted,

"My Dad's got a great big gun, and he'll kill off all the bourjoos."

"Oh, no, he won't," Vitya declared triumphantly. "My Daddy won't give him the holy blessing, and if he has no blessing he can't do anything at all."

Proshka, the shopkeeper's son, jabbed Misha in the chest.

"Don't you talk too big about that Dad of yours," he cried, his nostrils twitching. "He grabbed all my Dad's goods when the Revolution came. And my Dad, he says, 'Just you wait till the tables turn. First thing I do, I'll kill that herdsman Foma.' "

And Natasha, Proshka's sister, stamped her foot and yelled,

"Beat him up! What are you waiting for, boys?"

"Beat the Communist brat!" someone else cried.

"Bastard!"

"Give it to him, Proshka!"

Proshka swung a stick, and struck Misha across the shoulder. The priest's boy, Vitya, hooked Misha's leg and brought him down heavily, flat on his back in the sand.

Yelling, the boys threw themselves upon him. Natasha, squealing shrilly, tore at his neck with her sharp nails. Someone kicked him painfully in the belly.

Misha shook Proshka off, struggled to his feet, and made for home, zigzagging like a hunted hare. Loud whistles followed him, and someone threw a stone, but no one gave chase.

Only in the prickly green shelter of the hemp in the kitchen garden did Misha stop for breath. He sank down on the damp, fragrant soil, and wiped the blood away where his neck had been scratched. And then he began to cry. The sunlight, working its way down through the dense leafage, tried its best to peep into his eyes. It dried the tears on his cheeks, and tenderly kissed his curly, reddish crown, as Mother sometimes did.

Misha sat among the hemp for a long time—until the tears stopped flowing. Then he got up and went slowly into the yard.

His father was there, in the shed, tarring the wagon wheels. His cap had slipped to the back of his head, and its ribbons hung free. He was wearing a blue-and-white striped shirt. Misha sidled up to the wagon and stood silently watching. After a while, when he had summoned up the courage, he touched Daddy's hand, and asked, in a whisper,

"What did you do at the war, Dad?"

"Why, I fought, Son," Daddy returned, smiling under his red moustache.

"The boys.... The boys say all you fought was lice."

Again Misha choked with tears. But Daddy only laughed and swept Misha up in his arms.

"They're lying, Son. I was on board a ship. A big ship, that sailed the seven seas. And then I fought in the wars."

"Who did you fight?"

"I fought the bosses, Son. You see, you're still too small, so I had to go to the wars and fight for you. Why, there's even a song they sing about it."

His father smiled again, and, tapping out the time with his foot, sang softly:

Oh, my little Minka, Misha, mine,
Don't you go to the wars. Let your Daddy go.
Daddy's old. He's lived his life.
And you're still too young to take a wife!

Misha forgot all about his troubles, and laughed aloud—laughed at the way his Dad's red moustache bristled just like those plants Mother made brooms out of, and the way his lips smacked under the moustache, opening and shutting the round black hole of his mouth.

"Run along now, Minka," Daddy said. "I have to put the wagon to rights. In the evening, when you go to bed, I'll tell you all about the war."

* * *

The day dragged like a lonely road across the endless steppe. At long last, the sun went down. The herd swept through the village. The dust clouds settled, and the first star peeped out shyly down from the darkened sky.

Misha got awfully tired of waiting. Mother took so much time milking, and then straining the milk! And then she went down into the cellar and fooled around there for what must have been an hour! Misha hung around her, squirming with impatience.

"Mother! Ain't it supper-time yet?"

"Hungry? You'll just have to wait."

But Misha gave her no peace. He followed her everywhere ... down to the cellar, and up again to the kitchen—clinging like a leech, hanging to her skirts.

"Mo-o-other! Su-upper!"

"Get out of my way, you little nuisance. If you're so hungry, you can take a hunk of bread."

There was no quieting him. Even the slap his mother finally gave him did no good.

When supper came, he gobbled his food down hastily and dashed away to the other room. He flung his trousers behind the chest and dived straight into bed, under Mother's bright patchwork quilt. He lay very still, waiting for Daddy to come and tell him about the wars.

Grandad knelt before the icons, whispering prayers, bowing to the very floor. Misha lifted his head to watch. Bracing himself against the floor with his left hand, Grandad bent painfully forward until his forehead bumped the floor. At the

same instant, Misha banged his elbow against the wall.

Again Grandad whispered his prayers awhile, and then again he bowed his head to the floor—bump! And Misha banged his elbow against the wall—bang! Grandad got angry.

"I'll teach you, you imp, the Lord forgive me! Bang the wall again, and I'll bang you plenty!"

There would surely have been trouble, only just then Daddy came into the room.

"What are you doing here, Minka?" Daddy asked.

"I always sleep with Mother."

Daddy sat down on the edge of the bed. He didn't say anything for a while, just sat there twisting his moustache. Finally, he suggested,

"I thought you'd sleep with Grandad, in the kitchen."

"I don't want to sleep with Grandad."

"Why?"

"Because his moustache—it just stinks with tobacco."

Daddy sighed, and twisted his own moustache again.

"All the same, Son, you'd better sleep with Grandad."

Misha pulled the blanket up over his head, then peeped out again to mumble sulkily, "You slept in my place yesterday, and now you want it again. Go and sleep with Grandad yourself."

Sitting up suddenly, he pulled Daddy's head down and whispered in his ear, "You'd better go and sleep with Grandad, because Mother won't want to sleep with you anyway. You stink of tobacco too."

"All right, then, I'll go and sleep with Grandad. Only then I won't tell you about the wars."

Daddy got up and headed for the kitchen.

"Daddy!"

"Well?"

"Sleep here, if you want to," Misha said resignedly, getting out of bed. "Now will you tell me about the wars?"

"Yes, now I will."

Grandad got into bed first, leaving room for Misha on the outside. And after a while Daddy came into the kitchen, moved a bench up to the bed, and sat down. He had lit one of his evil-smelling cigarettes.

"Well, then, it was this way.... Do you remember when the field next to our threshing-floor belonged to the shopkeeper?"

Yes, Misha remembered that—remembered how he had liked to run up and down between the rows of tall, fragrant wheat. He had only to climb the stone fence of the threshing-floor, and there he was, right in the wheat. It was taller than he was, and hid him entirely. The heavy, black-bearded ears tickled his cheeks, and there was a smell of dust, and daisies, and the steppe wind.

"Misha," Mother would call after him, "don't go too far in the wheat. You'll lose your way."

"Well," Daddy went on after a while, gently stroking Misha's hair, "and do you remember the time we rode out past Sandy Hill, you and me, to the field where our wheat grew?"

Misha remembered that too: the narrow, crooked little plot beside the road, out past Sandy Hill, and the day he'd been there with Daddy and they'd found the wheat all trampled by somebody's cattle. Headless stalks, swaying in the wind; and scattered, broken ears on the ground, mixed with the dirt. Daddy's face had twisted terribly, and a few tears had rolled down his dust-grimed cheeks—Daddy's cheeks, Misha's big, strong Daddy! And that had made Misha cry, too.

On the way home, Daddy had asked Fedot, the watchman at the melon patch,

"Who spoiled my field?"

And Fedot had spat and answered, "The shopkeeper went past, driving some cattle to market, and he drove them through your field. On purpose."

Daddy drew his bench up closer.

"The shopkeeper and the other big-bellies, they grabbed all the land, and there was no place left for the poor people to grow their grain. And that's how things were everywhere—not only here in our village. Oh, but they were hard on us, in those days. We'd nothing to live on. So I got a job herding the village cattle. And then I was drafted to the army. Things were bad in the army, too. The officers would beat us for the least little thing. Well, and then the Bolsheviks came along, and they had a leader by the name of Lenin. Not a big man to look at, but terribly learned, for all that he comes of peasant stock—just like you and me. And those Bolsheviks, they said such things, all we could do was stand and gape. 'What are you thinking of, workers and peasants?' they would say. 'Take a broom to all the lords and officials, and drive them out for good. Everything belongs to you.'

"That was the way they talked to us, and we couldn't say a thing. Because, when we thought it over, we saw they were right. So we took the land and the estates away from the masters. Only the masters, they didn't like it. They couldn't be happy without their land. And they got just bristly mad, and went to war against us—against the workers and the peasants. So you see, Sonny, how it was.

"And that same Lenin, the Bolsheviks' leader, he roused the people up the way you turn up the soil with a plough. He roused the workers and the soldiers, and didn't they go for those masters! And didn't the feathers fly! The soldiers and the workers got to be called the Red Guard. And I was in the Red Guard too. We lived in a huge big house, the Smolny it was called. You should see the great long halls

there, Sonny, and the rooms—so many rooms, you could lose yourself there.

"I was on sentry duty one day, by the front door. It was bitter cold, and all I had to keep me warm was my army coat. The wind seemed to blow right through me. And then two men came out of the door. And as they passed, I saw that one of them was Lenin. And he came right up to me and asked in such a friendly way,

" 'Aren't you cold, Comrade?'

"And I said to him,

" 'No, Comrade Lenin, the cold can't beat us, nor no enemy neither. Once we've got the power in our own hands, we'll never give it back to those bourgeoises.'

"He laughed, and shook my hand warmly, and then he went on towards the gate."

His father fell silent. He got out his tobacco pouch and a bit of paper, and rolled himself a new cigarette. When he struck a match to light it Misha saw, on his bristly red moustache, a glittering tear-drop —like the drops of dew you can see of a morning, hanging from the nettle leaves.

"That's the sort he is. Everyone matters to him. He worries over every soldier, with all his heart. I saw him often after that day. He'd be going by, and recognise me from afar, and he'd smile and say,

" 'So the bourgeois won't beat us, eh?'

" 'Not they, Comrade Lenin,' I'd say to him.

"And things turned out just as he said, Sonny. We seized the land and the factories, and threw out the big-bellies the bloodsuckers. Don't you forget, when you grow up, that your Dad was a sailor and fought four long years for the Commune. I'll die, some day, and Lenin will die too, but the things we fought for will live for ever. Will you fight for the Soviets too, when you grow up, like your Daddy?"

"I will," Misha cried, and sprang up in bed to throw his arms around Daddy's neck. Only he forgot about Grandad, lying there beside him, and thrust his foot against the old man's belly.

Grandad let out an awful grunt, and tried to catch Misha by his forelock. But Daddy took Misha in his arms and carried him into the other room.

After a while, still in Daddy's arms, Misha fell asleep. But first he thought deeply about that extraordinary man, Lenin, and about the Bolsheviks, and the wars, and the great ships. Half dozing, he heard low voices, and breathed the sweetish smell of sweat and makhorka. And then his eyes shut tight, and wouldn't open any more—as if someone had pressed a hand over them.

Hardly was he asleep, when a city rose before him. The streets were wide, with chickens wallowing in scattered ash-heaps everywhere you turned. There were ever so many chickens at home in the village, but in the city there were ever so many more. And the houses—they were just as Dad had said. You'd see a great big house, roofed with fresh reeds—and on its chimney another house, and on that one's chimney another still. And the top chimney of all reached right up to the sky.

And as Misha walked along the street, his head tilted back to see better, who should come striding up to him but a great, tall man in a red shirt.

"Why do you hang around doing nothing, Misha?" the man asked, in such a friendly way.

"Grandaddy said I could go out and play," Misha answered.

"Well, and do you know who I am?"

"No, I don't."

"I'm Comrade Lenin."

Misha was so scared, his knees began to shake. He'd have made off, only the man in the red shirt took hold of his sleeve and said,

"You've got no conscience, Misha—not a farthing's worth. You know perfectly well I'm fighting for the poor folk. Why don't you join my army?"

"My Grandaddy won't let me," Misha explained.

"That's as you please," Comrade Lenin said. "Only there's no getting things straight without you. You've just got to join my army, that's all there is to it."

Misha took Comrade Lenin by the hand and said, most resolutely, "All right, then, I'll join your army without asking Grandad, and fight for the poor folk. Only if Grandaddy tries to whip me, you must stand up for me."

"I certainly will," Comrade Lenin said, and went off down the street. And Misha was so happy, he couldn't catch his breath. He wanted to shout, but his tongue went dry and stuck to the roof of his mouth.

Misha twitched suddenly in bed, bumped into Grandad—and woke.

Grandad's lips were moving, mumbling something through his sleep. Outside the window Misha could see the pale blue of the sky beyond the pond, and against it a pink foam of clouds floating across from the east.

* * *

Every evening, now, Daddy would tell Misha more tales about the wars, and about Lenin, and about all the different places he had seen.

Saturday evening the watchman from the village Soviet brought a stranger to the house—a squat little man in an army greatcoat, with a leather brief case under his arm.

"Here's a comrade Soviet official," the watchman said to Grandad. "Come from the town, he is, and he'll stay the night with you. Give him some supper, Grandad."

"We can do that," Grandad said. "Only, Mister Comrade, what are your credentials?"

Amazed at Grandad's erudition, Misha paused, finger in mouth, to listen.

"All the credentials you want, Grandad," the man with the leather brief case answered, smiling. And he turned to go into the house.

Grandad followed him, and Misha followed Grandad.

"What brings you to our village?" Grandad asked.

"I'm in charge of the new elections. You're to have new elections here, for the chairman and members of the village Soviet."

After a while Daddy came in from the threshing-floor. He shook hands with the stranger and told Mother to get supper ready.

After supper Daddy and the stranger sat down together on the kitchen bench and the stranger opened his leather brief case and got out a bunch of papers and showed them to Daddy. Misha hung around as close as he dared, trying to get a glimpse. Daddy took one of the papers and held it out to Misha.

"Look, Minka," he said, "this is Lenin."

Misha seized the photograph—and, as he stared at it, his mouth fell open in surprise. The man in the photograph was not tall, and he had no red shirt on either—just an ordinary jacket. He had one hand in his trouser pocket, and the other flung forward, as though pointing out the way. Eagerly, Misha examined the photograph, indelibly printing on his memory the arched brows, the smile that lurked in the eyes and lips, every detail of the pictured face.

The stranger reached for the photograph, locked it away in his brief case, and went to the other room to bed. He undressed and got into the bed, with his

greatcoat for blanket; but just as he was falling asleep the door suddenly creaked.

"Who's there?" he asked, lifting his head.

Bare feet came pattering across the floor.

"Who's there?" the stranger asked again. And then he saw that it was Misha, standing beside the bed.

"What is it, boy?" he asked.

For a moment Misha did not answer. Finally, summoning up his courage, he whispered, "Look, Mister—give me your Lenin."

The stranger did not say a word, just looked steadily down from his bed at Misha.

Misha was terribly frightened. Suppose the man was mean? Suppose he refused? Stumbling over the words in his eagerness, trying hard to stop his voice from trembling, Misha whispered,

"Give him to me, for keeps. I'll give you my tin box, a real good box, and every single knucklebone I've got, and"—with a desperate sweep of the arm —"yes, and the boots Daddy brought me, too!"

"But what do you want Lenin for?" the stranger asked, smiling.

He wouldn't agree, Misha thought. Bowing his head to hide the tears, he said heavily, "I want him, that's all."

The stranger laughed, pulled his brief case out from under the pillow and gave Misha the photograph. Misha hid it under his shirt, pressing it tight against his heart, and raced back to the kitchen. Grandad woke up and grumbled,

"What's wrong with you, running around in the middle of the night? I told you not to drink that milk at bedtime. If you've got to go that bad, you can pee in the slop pail. I'm not getting up to take you out of doors."

Misha got into bed without answering. He lay very still, afraid to move for fear of crumpling the

photograph, which he still held with both hands, pressed close to his heart. He fell asleep without changing his position.

It was scarcely light when he woke. Mother had just finished milking, and sent the cow off with the herd. At the sight of Misha she threw up her hands.

"What's bitten you? Why are you up so early?"

Holding the photograph tightly under his shirt, Misha slipped past his mother, across the threshing-floor and under the barn.

Coarse burdock grew around the barn, and a thick, bristly green wall of nettles. Under the barn, Misha cleared a little space by brushing away the dust and chicken droppings. He wrapped the photograph in a big, yellowed burdock leaf, laid it in the cleared space, and weighted it down with a stone, so the wind could not blow it away.

It rained all day. Grey cloud banks hid the sky. The yard was full of puddles, and swift rivulets raced one another down the street.

Misha had to stay indoors. But as evening fell Daddy and Grandad went off to the Soviet to attend the village meeting, and Misha, with Grandad's cap on his head, slipped out and followed them. The Soviet had its headquarters in the church lodge. Not without effort, Misha scrambled up the rickety, mud-caked porch steps. Inside, the place was packed. High up under the ceiling hung a cloud of tobacco smoke. At a table by the window sat the stranger, explaining something to the meeting.

Misha slipped stealthily to the back of the room and sat down on the last bench.

"Comrades, those voting for Foma Korshunov as chairman of the Soviet please raise your hands."

Prokhor Lysenkov, the shopkeeper's son-in-law, sitting right in front of Misha, shouted,

"Citizens! I object! He's no honest man. We found him out long ago, when he herded for the village."

Then Fedot, the shoemaker, jumped up from his seat on the window-sill and shouted too, waving his arms excitedly,

"Comrades! The big-bellies don't want a herdsman for chairman. But herdsman Foma, he's one of the proletariat, he'll stand up for Soviet power."

The wealthy Cossacks, bunched together by the door, began stamping and whistling. The room was filled with noise.

"Down with the herdsman!"

"Now he's back from the army, he can hire himself out again to be herdsman."

"To hell with Foma Korshunov!"

Misha looked around for Daddy, and found him standing right near by. Daddy's face was white, and Misha turned white too, out of fear for him.

"Order, comrades," the stranger yelled banging his fist down on the table. "Or we'll throw out the rowdies!"

"Give us a real Cossack for chairman!"

"Down with Foma!"

"Down with him! . . ."

All the richer Cossacks were shouting now, and loudest of all the shopkeeper's son-in-law, Prokhor.

A huge, red-bearded Cossack with a ring in his ear climbed on a bench. His jacket was all patched and tattered.

"Brothers!" he cried. "See what they're trying to do! The big-bellies, they want a man of their own for chairman. And then they can have things the way they were before. . . ."

He shouted and shouted, the big Cossack with the ring in his ear, but through the din Misha could only make out a word or two here and there:

"The land. . . . New share-out. . . . Clay and sand

for the poor folk, and the good black soil for themselves."

"Prokhor for chairman!" the group at the door was yelling. "Pro-kho-or! Kho-or! Kho-or!"

It was a long time before the din could be checked. The stranger shouted and shouted, frowning and spluttering. Cursing, most likely, Misha reflected.

When it got quieter, the stranger put the question loudly,

"Who votes for Foma Korshunov?"

A great many hands were raised. Misha raised his, too. Someone started counting, striding from bench to bench.

"Sixty-three ... sixty-four..."—and, pointing to Misha's hand—"sixty-five."

The stranger wrote something on a sheet of paper, and then shouted, "Who votes for Prokhor Lysenkov?"

Up went the hands of twenty-seven of the richer Cossacks and one more—miller Yegor's. Misha also raised his hand. But this time the man counting the votes, when he reached the back bench, happened to look down.

"Of all the little rascals!" he cried, grabbing Misha painfully by the ear. "Get out of here, before I thrash you! Voting—and how do you like that?"

Laughter broke out. The man who had counted the votes dragged Misha to the door and pushed him out. Tumbling down the slippery porch steps, Misha recalled what Daddy had once said, arguing with Grandad.

"Who gave you the right?" he shouted.

"I'll show you who!"

Injustice is always a bitter thing!

When Misha got home he snivelled a bit, and complained to Mother. But she was cross, and said,

"Well, don't go where you're not wanted. Poking your nose in everywhere—you're a real trial to me!"

Next morning, while the family were still at breakfast, the sound of far-away music was heard. Daddy put down his spoon and said wiping his moustache,

"That's a military band."

Misha was off like the wind. The door banged to behind him, and tap-tap-tap went his light footsteps across the yard.

Dad and Grandad went out too, and Mother leaned out of the window.

Rank upon rank of Red Army men were swinging up the village street like a surging greenish wave. The band marched in the lead, and the whole village rang to the blowing of its huge trumpets and the banging of its drum.

Misha was ready to burst with excitement. He spun around wildly on his heels, and ran to meet the marchers. A strange, sweet tingling filled his chest and rose to his throat. He looked up at the Red Army men's jolly, dust-grimed faces, at the musicians, with their cheeks puffed up so importantly. And he made up his mind, once and for all: he was going with them to fight in the war.

The dream he had had came back and, somehow mustering up the courage, he tugged at the cartridge pouch of one of the Red Army men.

"Where are you going? To fight in the war?"

"Where else? In the war, of course."

"Who will you fight for?"

"For the Soviets, youngster. Here—get in the lines."

He pulled Misha into the ranks. One of the men, grinning, flicked his finger against the boy's tousled head. Another fumbled in a pocket, got out a grimy lump of sugar, and pressed it into the boy's mouth.

When they reached the square, the order was shouted down the lines, "Halt!"

The Red Army men fell out, and threw themselves down to rest in the cool shade of the schoolhouse fence. A tall, clean-shaven fellow with a sabre hanging from his belt, lounged up to Misha, twisting his lips in a smile.

"Where d'you come from?" he demanded.

Misha squared his shoulders importantly, and hitched up his trousers.

"I'm going to fight in the wars with you," he declared.

"Comrade Battalion Commander!" one of the Red Army men called. "Take him along to be your adjutant!"

Everyone roared with laughter. Misha was close to tears; but the man they called so strangely, "battalion commander", frowned at the noise and answered sternly,

"What are you laughing at, blockheads? Of course we'll take him. Only on one condition." Here he turned to Misha. "Those pants of yours—they've only got one strap. We can't take you that way. You'd disgrace us. Look—I've got two straps to mine, and so have all the others. Just you run home as fast as you can, and get your mother to sew you on another strap. We'll be waiting for you here." And, with a wink at the men resting in the shade of the fence, he shouted, "Tereshchenko! Go and fetch a gun and an army coat for our new Red Army man."

One of the men got up and touched his hand to the peak of his cap.

"Right away," he said.

And off he went, at the double.

"Double quick, now," the battalion commander said to Misha. "Ask your mother to sew you on another strap, just as fast as she can."

Misha looked up at him sternly.

"You won't go back on your word, will you?"

"Don't you worry."

It was a long way home from the village square. By the time Misha reached the gate he was completely out of breath. He wriggled out of his trousers as he ran and tore barelegged into the house, crying,

"Mother! My pants! A strap!"

But the house was still and empty. A black swarm of flies hung, buzzing around the stove. Misha looked everywhere—the yard, the threshing-floor, the kitchen garden—but there was nobody anywhere—neither Mother, nor Dad, nor Grandaddy. He ran back to the house. Looking around, he spied an empty sack. With a knife, he cut a long strip of sacking. He had no time to waste on sewing, and anyway, he had never learned to sew. He tied the strap hastily to the back of his trousers, threw it over his shoulder, and tied it to the front. That done, he flew out of the house and dived under the barn.

Still puffing for breath, he rolled the stone away, and glanced at the photograph. Lenin's outstretched hand pointed straight at Misha.

"There!" Misha whispered. "Now I've joined your army."

He wrapped the picture carefully in its burdock leaf, thrust it under his shirt, and rushed off down the street—holding the photograph safely in place with one hand, and hitching up his trousers with the other. Running past the neighbours' fence, he called,

"Anisimovna!"

"What's up?" Anisimovna asked.

"Tell my folks not to wait dinner for me."

"Where are you off to, little scamp?"

"To the wars!"—and Misha waved a hand in farewell.

But when Misha reached the square he stopped short, petrified. There was not a living soul in sight. The ground along the fence was littered with cigarette ends, and empty tins, and somebody's torn puttees. The band was playing again, away down at the end of the village, and you could hear the tramp of marching feet on the hard-packed dirt road.

One despairing cry, and Misha ran after them, just as fast as his legs would carry him. And he'd have surely caught them up, if it hadn't been for a big yellow dog sprawled right across the road by the tannery, its teeth bared in a snarl. By the time Misha had got round the dog, the music and the tramp of feet had died away.

* * *

A day or two later a detachment of some forty men arrived at the village. These soldiers were not in uniform. They wore grease-stained work clothes, and shabby felt boots. When Daddy came home from the village Soviet for his dinner, he told Grandad,

"Get our wheat ready in the barn. There's a food detachment come, to collect the grain surplus."

The soldiers went from house to house, testing the earthen floors of the sheds with their bayonets, digging up buried grain, and loading it on carts to be taken to the communal granary.

The chairman's turn also came. One of the soldiers, puffing at a tobacco pipe, asked Grandad,

"Well, Grandad, tell us the truth. How much grain have you buried?"

But Grandad only stroked his beard.

"My son is a Communist," he answered proudly.

They went to the barn. The soldier with the pipe glanced at the bins, and smiled.

"Cart one binful to the granary," he said, "and keep the rest for yourself, for food and seed."

Grandad hitched old Savraska to the cart. He sighed once or twice, and grumbled to himself, but he loaded the wheat—it filled eight sacks—and, with a helpless shrug, drove off to the granary. Mother wept a little, sorry to part with the wheat. Misha, after helping Grandad to fill the sacks, went over to the priest's, to play with Vitya.

The two boys settled down on the kitchen floor, with some horses they had cut out of paper. But just then the soldiers came—the same group that had been to Misha's home. The priest went scurrying out to meet them, stumbling over his cassock hem in his nervous haste, and invited them into the parlour. But the soldier with the pipe said sternly,

"It's your barn we want to see. Where do you keep your grain?"

The priest's wife came hurrying into the kitchen, her hair all in a mess.

"Would you believe it, gentlemen," she said, with a foxy smile, "we haven't any grain at all. My husband hasn't made his rounds of the parish yet."

"Have you got a cellar anywhere?"

"No, no cellar. We've always kept our grain in the barn."

Misha remembered very well how he and Vitya had played in a spacious cellar opening from the kitchen.

"What about the one under the kitchen where me and Vitya played?" he said, turning to face the priest's wife. "You must have forgotten."

The priest's wife laughed, but her face turned pale.

"You're imagining things, child," she said. "Vitya, why don't you two go and play in the orchard?"

The soldier with the pipe smiled at Misha, screwing up his eyes.

"How do you get to that cellar, youngster?" he asked.

"Don't you believe that silly child," the priest's wife said, clenching her hands until the knuckles cracked. "We have no cellar, gentlemen, I assure you."

"Perhaps the comrades would like a bite to eat?" the priest suggested, smoothing the folds of his cassock. "Just come into the parlour."

Moving past the boys, the priest's wife pinched Misha painfully, but said, with the kindliest of smiles,

"Go out into the orchard, children. You're in the way."

The soldiers exchanged glances and set about a careful examination of the kitchen, tapping the floor with the butts of their rifles. They shoved aside a table that stood by the wall, and lifted the sacking that lay under it. The soldier with the pipe pulled up one of the floor boards and looked down in the cellar.

"You ought to be ashamed," he said, shaking his head. "Telling us you have no grain, when your cellar's piled to the top with wheat."

The priest's wife threw Misha such a look that he was frightened and wanted to get home just as fast as he could. He got up and made for the door. In the entrance the priest's wife caught up with him, seized him by the hair, and began shaking him. She was crying.

He jerked himself free and ran for home. Choking with tears, he told his mother what had happened. Her hands flew up in horror.

"What am I to do with you?" she cried. "Get out of my sight before I thrash you!"

After that, when Misha's feelings were hurt, he would go straight under the barn, roll aside the stone, undo the burdock leaf, and, his tears rolling down on to the photograph, he would confide all his troubles to Lenin.

A week passed. Misha was very lonely. He had no one to play with. None of the youngsters round about would have anything to do with him. It was not only "bastard" that they yelled after him now. There were new names the boys had picked up from their elders.

"Communist brat!" they would cry, and "Dirty Commie!"

Coming home from the pond late one afternoon, Misha heard his father's voice in the house, sounding very loud and stern. Mother was wailing as people do over the dead. Misha went inside. His father sat pulling on his boots. His army coat lay beside him already rolled.

"Where are you going to, Daddy?"

His father laughed.

"Quiet your mother, Sonny, if you can. She's breaking my heart with her crying. I have to go to the wars again, and she won't let me go."

"Take me along with you, Daddy."

Daddy pulled his belt tight, and put on his cap with the ribbons to it.

"Now, aren't you silly? How can we both go off together? You mustn't go till I get back. Or else who's to get the wheat in, when harvest comes? Mother has the house to tend to, and Grandad—he's getting old."

Misha kept back his tears, and even managed to smile as he said good-bye to his father. Mother hung on Daddy's neck, as she had when he came home, and he had a hard time making her let go. Grandad sighed and, kissing Daddy good-bye, whispered in his ear, "Look, Foma—what if you stayed home?

Can't they get along without you? What will we do if you get killed?"

"Drop it, Dad. That's no good. Who's to fight for the Soviets, if the men all hide behind their women's skirts?"

"Ah well, go, then, if you're fighting for what's right."

Turning away, Grandad furtively wiped away a tear.

They went as far as the village Soviet with father, to see him off. A score or so of men were waiting there, all of them with rifles. His father took a rifle too. And then he kissed Misha good-bye again and marched away with the other men, down the road leading out of the village.

Misha walked home with Grandad. Mother dragged unsteadily behind. Here and there in the village dogs were barking. Here and there, a light showed in someone's window. The village had wrapped itself in the dark of night, as an old woman wraps herself in her black shawl. A light rain was falling, and somewhere out in the steppe lightning kept flashing, followed by the dull rumble of thunder.

They walked home in silence. But as they reached the gate Misha asked,

"Grandaddy, who's my Daddy gone to fight against?"

"Don't bother me."

"Grandaddy!"

"Well?"

"Who's my Daddy going to fight?"

Bolting the gate, Grandad answered, "There's some wicked men gathered together, right near the village. A band, people call them. Only to my mind they're just plain robbers. That's who your Dad's gone off to fight."

"How many of them, Grandad?"

"Two hundred maybe—so people say. Off with you! It's high time you were in bed."

In the night, Misha was wakened by the sound of voices. He reached over to wake Grandad, but Grandad wasn't in the bed.

"Grandaddy! Where are you?"

"Shhh! Lie still and sleep."

Misha got up and groped his way across the dark kitchen to the window. Grandad was there, sitting on the bench in nothing but his underclothes, his head poked out through the open window—listening. Misha listened too. Through the still night, he clearly heard the shooting, somewhere beyond the village. Scattered shots at first, and then regular volleys.

Bang! Bang-bang!

Like somebody hammering nails.

Misha was frightened. He moved up close to Grandad.

"Is that my Daddy shooting?" he asked.

Grandad did not answer. And Mother was crying again.

The shooting went on all night. At daybreak, all fell silent. Misha curled up on the bench and dropped into heavy, unrefreshing sleep. Soon a group of riders galloped down the street towards the village Soviet. Grandad woke Misha, and hurried out into the yard.

Smoke rose in a black pillar over the village Soviet. Flames licked at the near-by buildings and horsemen charged up and down the streets. One of them shouted to Grandad,

"Got a horse, old man?"

"Yes."

"Hitch up, then, and go fetch your Communists. They're piled up in the brushwood. Tell their folks to bury them."

Grandad quickly harnessed Savraska to the cart,

took the reins with trembling hands, and drove off at a trot.

Shouts and screams rose over the village. The bandits were dragging hay from the lofts, and slaughtering sheep. One of them dismounted by Anisimovna's fence and ran into her house. Misha heard Anisimovna scream. The bandit came out, his sabre clattering in the doorway. He sat down on the porch, pulled off his boots, discarded his filthy foot-wrappings and replaced them with Anisimovna's bright Sunday shawl, torn roughly into two.

Misha climbed into Mother's bed and hid his head under the pillow. There he stayed until he heard the gate creak. Then he ran out of doors and saw Grandad, his beard all soaked with tears, leading the horse into the yard.

On the cart lay a man, barefoot, his arms flung wide. The man's head kept bumping against the back of the cart, and on the boards lay great, dark pools of blood.

Swaying slightly, Misha went up to the cart and gazed into the man's face. It was criss-crossed with sabre cuts. The teeth were bared. One cheek had been sliced off, and hung by a shred of skin. A huge green fly sat on one bloodshot, goggling eye.

Misha was shivering with horror; but realisation did not come at once. He tried to turn away, and then his eyes fell on the blue-and-white striped sailor's shirt, all bespattered with blood. He started violently, as though someone had struck him, and turned again to stare, wide-eyed, at the dark, unmoving face.

"Daddy!" he cried, jumping up on to the cart. "Daddy, get up! Daddy!"

He fell from the cart, and tried to run. But his legs buckled under him. On all fours, he crawled as far as the porch. And there he dropped, hiding his face in the sand.

* * *

Grandad's eyes had sunk deep, deep into their sockets. His head was shaking, and his lips moved soundlessly.

For a long time he sat stroking Misha's hair, without a word. And then, with a glance at Mother, prostrate on the bed, he whispered, "Come, Grandson, let's get out of here."

He took Misha by the hand and led him out on the porch. As they passed the open door of the other room, Misha shuddered and dropped his eyes. There, on the table, lay Daddy, so stern and still. The bloodstains had been washed away, but Misha could not forget that glassy, bloodshot eye, and the green fly on it.

At the well, Grandad fumbled endlessly, undoing the bucket rope. Then he led Savraska out of the barn, brushed the foam from the horse's lips with his sleeve, and slipped on the bridle. He stood listening a moment. The village rang with shouts and laughter. Two of the bandits rode by, their cigarette ends glowing through the dusk.

"Well, we showed them what's what with their surplus," one of them said. "They'll know better in the next world than to go grabbing people's grain."

When the hoofbeats had died away Grandad bent down and whispered in Misha's ear,

"I'm too old. I can't get up on the horse. I'll put you up, Grandson, and you ride straight to Pronin Farm. I'll show you the way. The soldiers are there, the ones that passed through the village with the drums and the bugles that time. Tell them to come quickly, because the bandits are here. Will you remember what to say?"

Misha nodded. And Grandad lifted him on to the horse's back, and tied his legs to the saddle with

the rope from the bucket, so he wouldn't fall off, and led the horse across the threshing-floor and past the pond, past the bandits' pickets, and out to the open steppe.

"See," Grandad said, "that gully cutting into the hill. Keep to the edge of the gully, and don't turn off anywhere. It will bring you straight to the farm. Well—good luck, my boy!"

Grandad kissed Misha, and slapped Savraska lightly on the haunch.

It was a clear and moonlit night. Savraska jogged along at an easy trot, snorting now and again. The weight of the rider bumping up and down in the saddle was so small that the horse often slackened its pace. Then Misha would give the reins a shake, or slap the horse's neck.

Out in the fields, where the ripening grain stood thick and green, the quail were calling cheerfully. A tinkle of spring water rose up from the gully. A cool breeze blew.

Misha felt frightened, all alone in the steppe. He threw his arms around Savraska's neck—a shivering human morsel, clinging to the warm flesh of the horse.

The track crawled uphill, then down a bit, then up again. Misha kept whispering to himself, afraid to look back, afraid even to think. He shut his eyes, and his ears were blocked by the stillness.

Suddenly Savraska tossed his head, snorted, and quickened his pace. Misha opened his eyes. Down below, at the foot of the hill, lights were faintly twinkling. Carried by the wind came the sound of dogs barking.

For a moment, Misha's chilled heart warmed with joy.

"Gee up!" he cried, banging his heels against the horse's sides.

The barking was nearer now, and up the slope the outlines of a windmill stood out faintly in the night.

"Who goes there?" came the call from the mill.

Misha silently urged Savraska on. Cocks were crowing.

"Halt! Who goes there? Stop, before I fire!"

That frightened Misha, and he tugged at the reins. But Savraska, sensing other horses near, neighed loudly and burst forward.

"Halt!"

Shots rang out from somewhere by the windmill. Misha's scream was drowned in the thudding of hooves. Savraska wheezed, reared, and fell heavily on his right side.

Pain shot through Misha's leg, pain so fearful, so utterly unbearable, that he could not even cry out. And Savraska's weight pressed down, heavier and heavier, on the aching leg.

The sound of hooves came nearer, nearer. Two riders appeared. With a clatter of sabres, they dismounted, and bent over Misha.

"God save us! Why, it's just a youngster!"

"Not killed?"

A hand was thrust under Misha's shirt, and warm, tobacco-laden breath brushed his face.

"Alive," the first voice said, with evident relief. "Looks like the horse hurt his leg."

Half-fainting, Misha managed to whisper, "There's bandits in the village. They killed my Daddy. And burnt down the Soviet. And Grandad says for you to come, as fast as you can."

Then everything went dimmer and dimmer, and rings of colour began to swirl before Misha's eyes.

Daddy went by, laughing, twisting his red moustache, and a big green fly balanced, swaying, on his eyeball. And there went Grandad, shaking his

head reproachfully. And Mother. And then a little man with a high forehead, his arm pointing straight at Misha.

"Comrade Lenin!..." Misha cried in a stilled voice and with a great effort raised his head, smiling and holding out his arms.

Translated by Helen Altschuler

ALEXANDER FADEYEV

"We were privileged to be the first to tell people about the socialist way of life and about how it was achieved," said Alexander Fadeyev, speaking of that generation of writers who entered the literary field at the time of the October Revolution.

Alexander Fadeyev (1901-1956) took part in the revolution and the Civil War in the Far East, where he, a seventeen-year-old lad, covered thousands of kilometres of forest paths with a partisan column. From these years of fighting Fadeyev gained many unforgettable impressions, both heroic and tragic. Sergei Lazo, leader of the Far East partisans, and Fadeyev's own cousin, Vsevolod Sibirtsev, were burned alive in a locomotive fire-box by the Japanese intervention forces.

Fadeyev's novels, *The Rout* and *The Last of the Udegeh*, and also a large number of short stories deal with the Civil War in the Far East. The story which follows is a chapter from *The Rout*.

METELITSA GOES ON RECONNAISSANCE

When Levinson, who commanded the partisan column, sent Metelitsa out to reconnoitre, he ordered him to be sure and return that night. The village he sent him to, however, was much farther away than Levinson had thought; Metelitsa left the column at four in the afternoon and rode his stallion hell for leather, crouched over its neck like a bird of prey. There was something both cruel and joyful in the way he distended his delicate nostrils, as though he were intoxicated by that mad ride after five slow, dull days on the march. When twilight fell, he was still hemmed in by the autumnal taiga, which showed no signs of thinning out, and could still hear nothing but the endless rustle of the grass in the cold, mournful light of the dying day. It was quite dark when he eventually got out of the forest and pulled the stallion up beside an old rotting log shed where beehives had been kept in winter; the roof had fallen in and it looked as if it had been abandoned long ago.

He tethered the horse, and, holding on to the edge of the woodwork, which crumbled under his hands, worked his way up to the roof at the risk of falling into a dark pit from which came the sickening stench of rotten wood and rancid grass. Rising on his strong legs to a half crouch, he stood motionless for about ten minutes, peering keenly into the night and listening, invisible against the dark background of the forest and more like a bird of prey than ever. Below lay a gloomy valley full of dark haystacks and small clumps of trees squeezed between two rows of hills that stood out black against an unfriendly, starlit sky.

Metelitsa leaped into the saddle and made for the road. It was a long time since carts had passed

that way and the ruts were scarcely visible in the grass. The slender trunks of birch-trees gleamed calm and white in the darkness, like extinguished candles.

He rode on to a low hill; to his left there was still the row of black hills that curved like the backbone of some gigantic animal. He could hear the sound of a stream. About two versts away, probably by the stream, a fire was burning and it reminded Metelitsa of the damp, lonely life of the herdsman; further on the unwinking lights of the village straddled the road. The line of hills to his right turned away and disappeared in the blue darkness; in that direction the terrain was much lower, probably an old watercourse; the slope was edged with black, gloomy timber.

"There must be a swamp down there," Metelitsa thought. He was beginning to feel the cold. His quilted jacket was unbuttoned and his army shirt, which had no buttons on it at all, was also open at the neck. He decided to go to the fire first. By way of precaution he pulled his revolver from its holster and stuck it in his belt under the jacket, putting the holster away in his saddle pouch. He had no rifle with him. Now he looked like a peasant riding in from the fields; since the war against the Germans many of them had been wearing soldiers' jackets.

He was quite close to the fire when the anxious neighing of horses broke out in the darkness. The stallion leaped forward, its mighty body trembling, its ears pressed back, and neighed in passionate and plaintive response. At that moment a shadow moved in front of the fire, and with a crack of his whip Metelitsa made the stallion rear.

Beside the fire stood a skinny, black-haired boy, his frightened eyes starting out of his head; in one hand he held a whip, while the other, in a ragged

sleeve, was lifted as though to protect himself. He was dressed in torn trousers, bast shoes and a jacket far too long for him, belted round with a hemp rope. Metelitsa brought his horse down savagely right in front of the boy, only just missing him. He wanted to shout a rough command but hesitated as he saw the frightened eyes looking at him over the dangling sleeve, the bare knees showing through the torn trousers, and the old jacket that must have belonged to the boy's employer. That childish neck was so absurdly thin and it protruded so guiltily and pitifully from the jacket....

"What are you standing there for? Scared, eh? You're a fool, my little sparrow, that's what you are!" Metelitsa was embarrassed and he spoke with a rough tenderness that he used when speaking to horses but never to people. "Wouldn't budge a step! Suppose I'd crushed you?... Silly little fool," he repeated, softening completely, feeling that the sight of this boy and his poverty had awakened something within him that was just as pitiful, funny and childish.... The boy could scarcely catch his breath from fright; he dropped his hand.

"Why did you come flying at me like a madman?" he said, trying to speak sensibly and independently like a grown-up, but nevertheless timidly. "Who wouldn't be scared? I've got horses here...."

"Horses?" Metelitsa drawled sarcastically. "You don't say!" He leaned back, arms akimbo, and looked again at the lad, screwing up his eyes and slightly raising his silky eyebrows, and suddenly he burst out laughing so honestly loud and in such kindly, merry tones that he himself wondered how he could produce such sounds.

The boy sniffed, still embarrassed and mistrustful, but then realised that there was nothing to be afraid of but, on the contrary, everything was turning out to be real fun. He wrinkled his nose so hard that

even its tip turned up, and also burst into thin, cheeky, childish laughter. It was so sudden that Metelitsa laughed still louder and the two of them, unwittingly egging each other on, continued laughing for several minutes—one of them rocking back and forth in his saddle, his teeth reflecting the light from the fire, and the other sitting on the ground, holding himself up with his hands as his body shook with each burst of laughter.

"You certainly made me laugh, boss!" Metelitsa said at last, kicking his feet out of the stirrups. "You're a queer chap, you are...." He jumped to the ground and held his hand out to the fire.

The lad stopped laughing and looked at him in serious and joyful astonishment, as though waiting for further amazing eccentricities.

"You're a merry devil, aren't you?" the boy said at last, very clearly, as though summing up his deepest convictions.

Metelitsa grinned. "Me? Yes, I am, lad...."

"And I was scared out of my skin," the boy admitted. "I've got the horses here. I was baking some spuds...."

"Spuds? That's good!..." Metelitsa sat down beside him but kept hold of the reins of his horse. "Where do you get 'em?"

"Over there.... There are plenty of them!" The boy waved his arm in a circle.

"So you steal them?"

"Yes. Let me hold the horse. It's a stallion, isn't it? I won't let it go, don't worry.... It's a good one, isn't it?" he added, casting an experienced glance at the animal's fine lines. "Where are you from?"

"Yes, not a bad animal," Metelitsa agreed. "And where are you from?"

"Over there." The boy nodded in the direction of the lights. "Khanikheza, that's our village.... Hun-

dred and twenty farms, no more'n no less," he said, repeating someone else's words, and spat on the ground.

"Oh.... And I'm from Vorobyovka across the mountains. Perhaps you've heard of it?"

"From Vorobyovka? No, I've never heard of it. Must be a long way off...."

"It is...."

"What are you doing here?"

"Well, how shall I put it? It's a long story.... I thought of buying some horses here, they tell me you have a lot.... You know, boy, I'm very fond of horses," said Metelitsa confidentially, "I've been looking after horses all my life, only not my own."

"D'you think these are mine? They're the boss's...."

The boy pulled a thin, dirty hand out of the dangling sleeve and began raking in the ashes with the whip handle; blackened potatoes rolled out alluringly.

"Want some?" the boy asked. "I've got some bread, too. Not much, though."

"Thanks, but I've just eaten—I'm full up!" Metelitsa lied, putting his hand to his throat; only then did he feel how hungry he really was.

The boy broke open a potato, blew on it, put one half in his mouth with the skin on, rolled it over with his tongue and began to chew it with great gusto, his pointed ears moving in unison with his jaws. When he had eaten that piece, he looked up at Metelitsa and spoke again, as clearly and distinctly as when he had pronounced him a merry devil.

"I'm an orphan, I've been an orphan for six months. The Cossacks killed my Dad, and they raped Mum and killed her, too, and my brother as well...."

"Cossacks?" asked Metelitsa, on the alert.

"Who else? And for no reason. And they set fire to the farm, and not only to ours, to about a dozen at least, and they come every month and raid us. About forty of them are there now. The volost centre, Rakitnoye, isn't far away. There's been a whole regiment there all summer. Savages, they are.... Have a spud...."

"Why haven't your people run away?... You've got plenty of forests here...." Metelitsa even sat up.

"What use is the forest? You can't hide there for ever. And there are swamps there, such bogs that you'd never get out...."

"Just as I thought," Metelitsa said to himself, remembering his recent assessment of the terrain.

"D'you know what," he said, rising to his feet, "you put my horse to pasture and I'll go to the village on foot. I see there's nothing to be bought here. They're more likely to take the last shirt off your back...."

"What's the hurry? Sit down!" said the young herdsman, disappointedly. He also got up. "It's lonely here," he explained in a plaintive voice looking at Metelitsa with his big, moist, pleading eyes.

"I can't stay, old chap." Metelitsa indicated inevitability with his outspread arms. "I must see for myself while it's still dark.... I'll soon be back and we'll hobble the stallion meanwhile. Where's the chief of these Cossacks staying?"

The lad explained how to find the house in which the squadron commander was living and how to get there by back ways.

"Are there many dogs?"

"Plenty, but they're not savage."

Guided by the boy's description, Metelitsa passed through a number of lanes, turned by the church and eventually reached the painted fence of the

priest's garden. (The squadron commander was staying with the priest.) Metelitsa looked into the place and all round it and listened carefully and, not finding anything suspicious, climbed soundlessly over the fence.

He found himself in a densely planted orchard, but the wide-spreading branches were already leafless. Metelitsa made his way forward, holding his breath and trying to restrain the powerful beating of his heart. Suddenly he found that the orchard was intersected by a path, and about twenty yards up it to the left he saw a lighted window; it was open and there were people in the room. An even light spread over the dead leaves and the apple trees looked strangely golden where the light fell on their boughs.

"So there they are!" thought Metelitsa, his cheek twitching nervously as he felt himself fired by the grim, inescapable urge of fearless desperation that usually drove him to the most reckless exploits; while he was still wondering whether anybody required him to listen to the conversation of these people in the lighted room, he realised that actually he would not go away from there until he had. A few minutes later he was standing behind an apple tree right under the window, listening eagerly and remembering everything that was happening *there.*

There were four of them playing cards at a table on the other side of the room. On the right sat a little old priest with his hair slicked back and keen eyes darting here and there as he dealt the cards skilfully with his tiny hands, trying so hard to get a glimpse of each of them that his neighbour, whose back was towards Metelitsa, took the cards as they were dealt and concealed them under the table, giving them no more than a hurried, apprehensive glance. Facing Metelitsa sat a handsome, stout, lazy-looking and apparently good-humoured officer with

a pipe between his teeth—Metelitsa took him for the squadron commander, probably because he was so stout. But Metelitsa, although he could not have explained why, paid most attention to the fourth player, a man with a pale, puffy face and unwinking eyes; he was wearing a black sheepskin cap and a Caucasian goatskin cloak without shoulder-straps, which he wrapped closer round himself every time he played a card.

Contrary to Metelitsa's expectations, they spoke of the commonest and most uninteresting things; at least half their talk revolved around the cards.

"Eighty," said the player whose back was towards Metelitsa.

"Too low, Your Excellency," said the one in the black sheepskin cap. "A hundred blind," he added carelessly.

The stout, handsome officer examined his cards with narrowed eyes and, taking the pipe out of his mouth, raised the betting to a hundred and five.

"Pass," said the first, turning to the priest, who was holding the remainder of the pack.

"That's what I thought," grinned the sheepskin cap.

"Is it my fault if I don't get any cards?" answered the other, turning to the priest for sympathy.

"Every little helps," joked the priest, closing his eyes and giving a tiny little laugh, as though by such an insignificant laugh he wished to stress the insignificance of his companion's play. "Two hundred points and two already down to you—we know you! . . ."

He wagged a threatening finger and pretended to smile with affectionate slyness.

What a louse, thought Metelitsa.

"And you pass, too?" the priest asked the lazy-looking officer. "And these go to you." The last re-

mark was addressed to the sheepskin cap, to whom the priest passed additional cards face down.

For a minute they slapped their cards frantically on the table until at last the sheepskin cap lost. You boasted too much, fishy eyes, Metelitsa thought disdainfully; he did not know whether he ought to go or wait a little longer. But he could not have gone in any case, because the loser had now turned to the window and Metelitsa felt that piercing stare fixed on him in unwinking precision.

In the meantime the player with his back to the window began shuffling the cards. He did it carefully and with a strange economy of movement, like an old lady praying.

"Nechitailo isn't back yet," said the lazy one, yawning. "Seems to have had some luck. Pity I didn't go with him. . . ."

"Two of you?" asked the sheepskin cap, turning away from the window. "Why not, she's a sturdy wench," he added, with a grimace.

"Vasenka?" enquired the priest. "Uh, uh. . . . She certainly is. . . . We had a big, hefty singer here—I think I told you about him. . . . Only Sergei Ivanovich wouldn't have agreed. Never. . . . D'you know what he told me yesterday in secret? 'I'll take her with me,' he said, 'and I,' he said, 'won't be afraid to marry her.' . . . Oh!" the priest stopped short and covered his mouth with his hand, a cunning twinkle in his crafty little eyes. "There's a memory for you. I've let the cat out of the bag, although I didn't intend to. Don't give me away!" And he waved his hands in mock fright. Although they all, like Metelitsa, could see the insincerity and covert obsequiousness in his every word and gesture, nobody referred to it and all laughed.

Metelitsa, still crouching, backed away from the window. He had just turned into the path running across the orchard when he ran into a man with a

Cossack greatcoat thrown over one shoulder; behind him were two more.

"What are you doing here?" the man asked him in surprise, hitching up the greatcoat, which had almost fallen when Metelitsa ran into him.

Metelitsa leapt back and made for the bushes.

"Stop! Hold him! Hold him! There he is! Hi!" several voices shouted. A few sharp shots rang out behind him. Metelitsa got tangled in the bushes and lost his cap, then went forward by guesswork; but voices were now yelling and howling ahead of him and the angry barking of a dog came from the street.

"There he is! Hold him!" someone shouted, jumping at him with one hand outstretched. A bullet hummed past Metelitsa's ear.. Metelitsa fired back. The man running after him stumbled and fell.

"You won't catch me!" Metelitsa exclaimed triumphantly; and up to the very last minute he really did not believe they could capture him.

But someone big and heavy jumped on him from behind and crushed him to the ground. He tried to get his hand free, but a cruel blow on the head dazed him....

Then they all took turns at beating him, and even as he lost consciousness he could still feel blow after blow on his helpless body....

Metelitsa regained consciousness in a big, dark shed. He was lying on the damp ground and his first sensation was of the cold, earthy dampness striking through him. He immediately recalled what had happened. The blows he had received still rang in his head, there was clotted blood in his hair and he could feel the dried blood on his cheeks and forehead.

The first thought that took clear shape in his mind was—could he get away? It was incredible to him that after everything he had experienced in life, after all his exploits, all the successes that had made his name famous, he would in the end lie and rot like everyone else. He went over the whole shed, feeling every tiny crack, and even tried to break open the door, but to no effect. On all sides there was nothing but cold, dead wood, and the cracks were so hopelessly small that he could not so much as see through them; they scarcely let in the light of the dull autumn dawn.

He kept feeling his way about, however, until at last he realised with deadly, implacable certainty that this time there was no getting away. When he was finally convinced of this the question of his own life and death immediately ceased to interest him. All his spiritual and physical strength was now concentrated on something that was actually insignificant when compared with his own life and death but which now mattered to him more than anything else—the problem of how he, Metelitsa, the famous daredevil, could show the people who would kill him that he was not afraid of them and utterly despised them.

He had not had time to give the matter sufficient thought when he heard a noise outside the door, bolts were pushed back and two Cossacks, armed and in uniform, entered the shed together with the pale, quivering light. Metelitsa, standing with his feet astride, stared at them with narrowed eyes.

When they saw him, they hesitated in the doorway, and the one who was behind sniffed uncomfortably.

"Come on out, boy," said the one in front mildly, in an almost guilty tone.

Metelitsa, his head lowered stubbornly, went out of the shed.

He was soon standing in front of a familiar figure —the man in the black sheepskin cap and Caucasian cloak—in the room he had watched during the night from the priest's orchard. There, too, sitting erect in an armchair, was the handsome, stout and good-natured officer whom Metelitsa had taken for the squadron commander; he looked at Metelitsa in surprise but not sternly. As Metelitsa now surveyed the pair of them he realised by certain barely perceptible signs that the man in the cloak and not the kindly-looking officer was the commander.

"You may go," snapped the commander to the two Cossacks who were standing in the doorway.

They stumbled awkwardly against each other as they left the room.

"What were you doing in the orchard yesterday?" the commander asked rapidly, standing in front of Metelitsa and looking at him with his precise, unwinking glance.

Without answering Metelitsa stared at him derisively, standing up to the officer's glance; his silky black eyebrows quivered slightly and his whole pose showed that irrespective of what questions were put to him and what they did to make him answer them he would not tell them anything that could satisfy his inquisitors.

"Drop that nonsense, said the commander, not in the least angrily; he did not raise his voice but spoke in tones that showed he understood exactly what was going on inside Metelitsa at the moment.

"Why talk for nothing?" Metelitsa said, condescendingly.

For several seconds the squadron commander studied the motionless, pock-marked face, smeared with dried blood.

"Is it a long time since you had small pox?"

"What?" asked Metelitsa in confusion. He was confused because there was neither derision nor mockery in the commander's question; the officer was apparently merely interested in his pock-marked face. When he realised this, however, Metelitsa grew even more angry than if they had mocked and derided him; the officer's question was obviously an attempt to establish some sort of human contact between them.

"Are you a local man, or do you come from some other part?"

"Cut it out, Your Honour!..." said Metelitsa, in angry determination. He clenched his fists; his face was flushed and he could hardly prevent himself from attacking the officer. He wanted to add something, but the thought that he could actually seize the man in black with the unpleasantly calm bloated face and the untidy reddish growth of beard and could strangle him suddenly took hold of Metelitsa so forcibly that he forgot what he had been going to say and took a step forward, his fingers twitching and his pock-marked face bathed in sweat.

"Oho!" the officer exclaimed loudly, for the first time expressing surprise. He did not, however, step back or take his eyes off Metelitsa, who stood still irresolutely, his eyes flashing.

Then the officer drew his revolver and brandished it under Metelitsa's nose. Metelitsa regained control of himself, turned away to the window and froze into a contemptuous silence. After that, no matter how much he was threatened with the revolver, no matter what awful punishment was promised for the future, no matter how much they urged him to tell the truth about everything and offered him his freedom—he did not say a single word and did not look once at his interrogators.

While the interrogation was still in progress, the door opened softly and a hairy head with big, scared, foolish eyes poked into the room.

"So they are ready, are they?" said the squadron commander. "All right, tell the boys to take this fellow along."

The same two Cossacks led Metelitsa out into the yard, pointed to an open gate and followed him through it. He did not look round but felt that the two officers were also following behind. They reached the square in front of the church. There was a crowd outside the churchwarden's house, hemmed in on all sides by mounted Cossacks.

It had always seemed to Metelitsa that he disliked and despised people, engrossed as they were in petty and trivial affairs. He had thought himself completely indifferent to what they thought of him or said about him; he had never had any friends and had never tried to have any. Nevertheless, although he had never noticed it himself, everything of any importance that he had done in his life he had done *for* people, *for the sake* of people, so that they would look at him, be proud of him, admire and praise him. And now, when he threw back his head, he suddenly took in, not only with his glance but with his whole heart, that silent, colourful, fidgeting crowd of peasants, boys, women in skirts of bright homespun cloth, girls in white scarves with floral designs, cheeky horsemen with floppy forelocks, all as clean, brightly-coloured and smartly attired as in cheap prints, their long mobile shadows dancing on the sward, and even the ancient domes of the church overhead that towered motionless in the cold sky lit up by the scanty sunshine.

"That's something like!" he almost exclaimed. He opened up completely, overjoyed with it all, the life, the brightness, the poverty, with everything that moved and breathed and shone all round and

thrilled within him. He strode forward more quickly and freely with a light, animal tread that seemed scarcely to touch the earth; his pliant body swayed as he walked and everyone on the square turned towards him and with sudden excitement also felt that an animal strength, as light as that tread, lived in his pliant and eager body.

He walked through the crowd, looking over their heads, but feeling their silent and concentrated attention, and halted at the porch of the churchwarden's house. The officers overtook him and went up on to the porch.

"Over here, over here," said the squadron commander to Metelitsa, showing him a place beside the officers. Metelitsa took the steps in a single bound, and stood next to him.

Now he was plainly visible to everyone—a lithe, upright figure, black-haired, wearing deerskin breeches and an unbuttoned shirt belted with a cord the green tassels of which showed from under his quilted jacket; there was a distant animal fire in his restless eyes that stared towards the high mountain peaks towering motionless in the grey mist of early morning.

"Who knows this man?" the squadron commander asked, turning his sharp, piercing eyes on the crowd, his glance resting for a second first on one face, then on another.

And every man on whom that glance came to rest lowered his head uncomfortably—only the women, who did not possess the power to turn their eyes away from him, stared at him dumbly and stupidly in awed curiosity.

"Does *nobody* know him?" the commander asked again. He mockingly stressed the word "nobody" as though he were absolutely certain that, on the contrary, everyone ***knew*** or ***ought to know*** "this

man". "We'll soon see about that.... Nechitailo!" he shouted. He waved his hand to a tall officer in a long Cossack greatcoat seated on a prancing chestnut stallion.

There was suppressed excitement in the crowd and those standing at the front turned to look back—someone in a black waistcoat was pushing his way determinedly through the crowd, his head bowed so low that only his warm fur cap could be seen.

"Let me through, let me through!" he said rapidly. With one hand he was clearing a way for himself, and with the other, dragging someone along behind him.

At last he reached the porch and it could be seen that he was leading a skinny, black-haired lad in a long jacket, who was hanging back fearfully and staring wide-eyed first at Metelitsa, then at the squadron commander. The crowd became more voluble, sighs and the soft murmuring of women could be heard. Metelitsa looked down and at once recognised the black-haired boy as yesterday's herdsman—the same frightened eyes, the same funny, thin, childish neck—with whom he had left his horse.

The man who held the boy by the hand removed his cap, revealing an unusually flat crown. His brown hair was speckled with grey, just as if it had been unevenly sprinkled with salt. Bowing to the officers, he started to tell his tale.

"This young herdsman of mine...."

But suddenly he became afraid they would not hear him out, so he bent down to the boy and then pointed his finger at Metelitsa.

"Is that him?"

For several seconds the boy and Metelitsa looked each other straight in the eyes—Metelitsa with feigned indifference, the boy with fear, sympathy

and pity. Then the boy turned his eyes towards the squadron commander, stared at him woodenly for a moment, and finally looked at the man who was gripping his arm and bending over him, waiting for an answer; he heaved a deep and painful sigh and shook his head in denial.... The crowd, which had grown so quiet that the people could hear the fidgeting of the calf in the sexton's cowshed, wavered slightly and again froze into immobility....

"Don't you be afraid, silly, don't be afraid," said the man gently, although he was becoming frightened himself and kept jerking his finger nervously at Metelitsa. "Who could it be if it wasn't him?... You admit it, admit it, or else.... Oh, to hell with you!" Suddenly, with all his force, he tugged fiercely at the boy's arm and let it go. "It's him, Excellency, who else could it be!" he exclaimed loudly, as though excusing himself, and humbly twisted his cap in his hands. "Only the boy's afraid. But who else could it be, when the horse is saddled and there's a holster in the bag.... He rode up to the fire in the evening. 'Graze my horse,' he says and off he goes to the village; and the boy waited and waited until it got light, and then brought in the horse. And the horse was saddled, and the holster's in the saddle-bag.... Who else could it be?"

"Who rode up? What holster?" asked the commander, doing his best to understand what it was all about. The man twisted his cap in still greater confusion and again, halting and stammering, told the story of how his herdsman had that morning brought home a strange saddled horse with a revolver holster in the saddle-bag.

"So that's it, is it?" drawled the squadron commander. "But he doesn't want to admit it?" He nodded towards the boy. "All right, bring him here, we'll ask him in our own way...."

The boy, pushed on from behind, approached the porch but hesitated to go on to it. The officer ran down the steps, seized him by his thin, trembling shoulders, and stared into the boy's terrified face with his piercing, awe-inspiring eyes. . . .

The boy suddenly began screaming and rolling his eyes.

"What do you call that?" gasped one of the women, unable to contain herself.

But at that moment a lithe, swift body flew from the porch. The crowd swayed back, arms waving, as though from a single body; the squadron commander was knocked off his feet by a powerful blow. . . .

"Shoot him! Why don't you do something?" bawled the handsome officer holding out his hand helplessly, flustered, foolish and apparently forgetting that he could have fired at Metelitsa himself.

Some of the horsemen rode into the crowd, pushing the people aside with their horses. Metelitsa was holding his enemy down by the weight of his whole body and trying to grab him by the throat, but the officer was writhing as if he were a wood spirit, his goatskin cape spread out on the ground like black wings; one hand was frantically fumbling for the revolver at his belt. At last he managed to unfasten the holster, and just as Metelitsa took him by the throat he fired several shots into his assailant's body. . . .

When the Cossacks who had come hurrying up pulled Metelitsa away by the legs he was still clutching at the grass; he ground his teeth and tried to raise his head, but it dropped helplessly and dragged along the ground.

"Nechitailo!" shouted the handsome officer. "Form up the squadron! . . . Will you go, too?" he asked

the commander courteously, although he avoided meeting his glance.

"Yes."

"The squadron commander's charger! . . ."

Half an hour later the Cossack squadron in full battle order left the village and hurried uphill along the road Metelitsa had travelled the previous evening.

Translated by George H. Hanna

VSEVOLOD IVANOV

Vsevolod Ivanov (1895-1963) was a native of Siberia. He spent his youth moving about the towns and villages of that huge country, frequently changing his occupation—shop assistant, sailor, member of a troupe of wandering actors, circus artist and type-setter. He fought in the Civil War and began writing in the early years after the revolution under the guidance of Maxim Gorky, who was then mustering and organising the Russian intelligentsia.

Ivanov became widely known when he published his *Partisan Tales* and later his novel *Parkhomenko*, the story of an outstanding Red Army commander of the Civil War. The Moscow Art Theatre staged the play *Armoured Train 14-69* based on one of Ivanov's stories and it has since found a permanent place in the Soviet classic repertoire.

The short story *Letter T* tells an episode of the Civil War.

LETTER T

In his usual carefree manner, Ivan Pankratov was fond of repeating that he would die standing at the type fount and that his body would be carried out of the composing room as a letter is taken from the galley—face to the wall and not to the ceiling. His workmates admired him for his carefree ways, for his liveliness and his cheerful greying head, and also for those five wrinkles that cut across his rosy face like so many scars, telling the world that this was a man who had seen many winds and much sun.

Ivan had long been aware that his sight was beginning to fail—the bright sky with its jolly clouds was not so bright any more and the grey of evening set in earlier. He was transferred from letter-press to theatre bills, but he still made too many mistakes. The management begged his pardon when they transferred him to the job of taking copy round to other compositors and of distributing used type. Ivan was not down-hearted even at this, and only said that his hands probably shook because of his age; he said nothing about his eyes—he seemed to have kept quiet about many things in the course of his life.

And because of his optimism and his fine spirit, and because they were sorry for him, his fellow workers put pieces of black paper in the type boxes before he began distributing type from a used form. Ivan would distribute his stint for the day and next morning the others would lift out the paper and put the letters in the proper boxes; for Ivan had grown so blind that letters went into neighbouring boxes —"k" into "l", for instance. Ivan was afraid of newcomers to the printing works, it was difficult for

him to get used to them, their faces seemed to merge into a blue haze. . . .

On the day our story begins Mishka Blagoveshchensky started work in the shop. He was young, no more than sixteen, but with a wealth of experience behind him. In his short, homeless life he had travelled the length and breadth of Russia and had been in most of the big cities. Mishka was in a bad mood when he came to work; furthermore, there were rumours in the town that the *basmachi** and Whiteguards were advancing from the desert. It was said that they were led by Ataman Kashimirov, a Cossack officer notorious for his cruelty—and Mishka was a coward, he boasted of his cowardice, and so nobody believed in it. He arrived at the printing works early in the morning. A boy apprentice was already re-sorting Ivan Pankratov's mixed letters and was complaining of his degrading job, so Mishka greeted Ivan with malicious laughter. Ivan walked with a light, confident step and when he stopped in the doorway, his white forelock was above the lintel.

Yershov, the make-up man, called Mishka behind a printing-press, where he was out of sight, and brought his turpentine-soaked fist within an inch of the lad's nose, drawing his short, angry-looking eyebrows together in a frown. Mishka said no more after that and Ivan realised that the others had not allowed him to speak.

It was a dull day with clouds hanging low after two weeks of rain. Clay oozed from under the sand, giving off a sickening smell of rot. The steamer *Volna Revolyutsii* was moving slowly down the Amu Darya towards the small town of X, carrying two companies of Red Army troops, some field-guns and

* Gangs of bandits in Central Asia who fought against Soviet power.—*Tr.*

munitions. The steamer was coming to the aid of the town for it was a fact, and no rumour, that the *basmachi* were advancing on the town from the desert. It was making slow progress because the Amu Darya flows through sandy desert and frequently changes its course; it has numerous sand-bars and shallows and its waters are swift-flowing and dangerous. There had been buoys marking the bars but the *basmachi* had destroyed them—and, even if they hadn't, there would have been no one left to look after them, anyway. Every night the steamer dropped anchor and every night there was cursing, because the soldiers wanted the vessel to keep going at night!... In their way they were right; it was more dangerous to sleep than to keep moving. The little flat-bottomed boats of the *basmachi* could not be heard on account of the rustling of the reeds in the wind.... All lights were doused on the boat and the crew kept their rifles at the ready. At last the time came when the soldiers were informed that it was no more than ten or fifteen versts to the town. But heavy rain began to fall and the sky was completely overcast. The raging waters of the Amu Darya were shut in on both sides by brownish-yellow sand-hills.

On one of the hills stood a huge, bare tree, crowned with a raven's nest. The sailors went ashore and climbed the hill. The raven would not let them climb the tree and attacked them several times (under the tree lay the shells of young tortoises that the young ravens apparently fed on). There came a flash of lightning and a careful sailor shot at the raven, the thunder drowning the sound of the shot. Before them lay an endless bluish-brown plain covered with gravel. In the distance they could see some purple hills but nothing that looked like a town. The crew were beginning to lose heart. They argued softly for a long time and eventually decided

to drop anchor. Then the odour of rot reached them from the banks. The tightly strained anchor chain vibrated in the tiny, savage waves. The river, a dirty yellow, heavy and cold, raced past the vessel....

In the town the Revolutionary Committee had been expecting the steamer for a long time and for two days already the landing-stage has been decorated with small red pennants (they were already fading and the fierce rain had torn some of them down). Half the town was inhabited by Cossacks and the Revolutionary Committee feared many of them would take sides with the *basmachi* and the White-guards, and was afraid to call on the Cossacks to defend the town although the rest of the population had been mobilised. Despite the rain the Cossacks went about fully armed, singing and playing their mouth-organs brought from the front; this all served to intensify the anxiety. Those occupying the trenches outside the town on the desert side looked mostly towards the town, listening gloomily to its noises. The desert was dark and damp.

Farther away, some twenty versts or so from the town, the *basmachi* had made a camp in the hills by tying together the tops of bushes and covering them with horse rugs and saddle cloths; in these shelters they slept, the Ataman, General Kashimirov, among them. They had traversed almost the entire Kyzyl Kum desert, the town was not far away and beyond it the Amu Darya, and beyond the Amu Darya was holy, fragrant Khiva! The *basmachi* and the Ataman, however, believed that the town was strong! At last they caught a Kirghiz *uyanchi*, a wandering minstrel, on his way from Khiva to Bukhara; this minstrel told them that the Russians had been diverting the waters of the Amu Darya for the last three days, that the Russians possessed a strength that could not be described even

in song, that the Russians were great titans; at this point Ataman Kashimirov shot the minstrel in the mouth. Then the *basmachi* decided that the *uyanchi* had been sent to them as a spy; wet whips flashed and there was a jingle of stirrups. The *basmachi* were riding towards the town.

In the town they really were digging a canal, standing in mud and slush in the pouring rain. The night the steamer *Volna Revolyutsii* dropped anchor some fifteen versts from the town, it had suddenly given a lurch. The sleepy crew were about to fire, then realised that the plash of the water around them had ceased. And through the rain next morning the soldiers saw that the river had moved about two hundred yards from the ship. The steamer was perched clumsily on the mud of the river-bed. The sailors, up to their knees in mud, dragged a boat to the river. Old tree stumps, black and slimy, jutted up on all sides. Huge fish that had not had time to get away were thrashing about in little puddles in the rain. The sailors rowed their boat to the town, and there the Revolutionary Committee ordered a further mobilisation and requisitioned picks and shovels.

Contingents fell in awkwardly and marched away to dig a canal that would carry water to the steamer. There was still a drizzle of rain, with low, grey clouds. . . .

It was cold in the printing works, the type was sticky because there was nothing to wash it with, no turpentine and no kerosene. The ink dried and the platens in the printing-presses passed over the type without making an impression on the paper. The printers had been mobilised to dig the canal and only Ivan Pankratov and Mishka remained behind.

Ivan walked back and forth among the type cases as briskly as usual, his hands behind him, coughing

as he walked and feeling sorry because he had just remembered an interesting story and there was no one to tell it to. Mishka, to avoid mobilisation, had scratched his foot on the instep with a nail and was limping and cursing; he was cutting narrow strips of paper to be pasted crosswise on the windows so that the glass would not be broken by gun-fire. Ivan Pankratov wandered back and forth, looked at the window panes and said that they ought to have been cleaned long ago, they did not let any light through. Mishka snapped back at him—they had been cleaned that very morning—and the rain had washed them after that. The old man merely went on staring with untroubled gaze at the windows he could scarcely see. Suddenly Tulumbayev, the Military Commandant of the town, appeared in the doorway.

Tulumbayev, a stooped, determined-looking man, was holding a sheet of paper covered with neat handwriting; he said that information had been received that the *basmachi* and the Ataman's forces, led by General Kashimirov, were approaching the town from the desert and would reach the trenches in an hour and a half or two hours. The Revolutionary Committee informed the printing workers that the fate of the town was in their hands. A meeting had been called in the Cossack club, but the Cossacks would not come to it unless a manifesto was posted up all over the town; this manifesto contained the text of a telegram from the Centre which gave the Cossacks and Turkmenians equal rights to pastures and meadowlands. There was no time to get to the steamer and recall the printers. And there was nobody to send; they had to talk now, to act now! Tulumbayev gave the old printer the original of the manifesto.

"When shall I come for them?" he asked.

"In forty minutes!" answered Ivan Pankratov.

The commandant shook hands with him, touched

the peak of his cap and went rapidly away, displaying resolution in his every movement. It was still drizzling outside, it seemed quiet, but confusion was beginning in the town; they did not know where to take the machine-guns—to the Executive Committee building or to the trenches outside the town. Wire was being put up across the roads.

Ivan Pankratov stood with the manifesto in his hands and saw before him a solid grey sheet with even lines on it. His neck ached unaccountably and there was a sharp pain at the temples, so sharp that it hurt him to turn round. Mishka fidgeted about in front of him, whining, and, frightened by his own cries, began stamping his feet. He shouted that he did not want to be shot because of this old devil who had always pretended he could set type. He was sorry he had not learned something of the trade himself, he was suffering because of it—if only he knew something about the type fount in its case! Gasping with anger, Mishka seized Ivan Pankratov by the arm, by that long and heavy hand. He led the old man to the type case, ran round the table till he stood opposite him, rested his elbows on the ink-stained wood and then fell forward on to it.

'We'll be shot because of you! Our own people will shoot us.... Set it up!"

The paper rolled up in Ivan's hand. The lines of writing disappeared. Suddenly he remembered about his old woman who had died shortly before. At the very last moment she had looked pitifully at him. "You, Ivan Pankratov," she had said, "are like a gadfly; you fly like a bird, you roar like an ox...." She would have said more but tears filled her eyes. At the time Ivan had been really amazed at those tears and he had decided that they meant that the old woman did not want to die, that she was sorry to part with her life. And now, as he stood there, with the copy he could not see in his hands, he real-

ised that for a long time he had been deceiving himself and that others had deceived him and been sorry for him. He understood the meaning of many snatches of talk he had heard and realised why there had always been very little type to distribute, and why the compositors had said that there was little work and that he, Ivan Pankratov, could take a rest, could even go home. Ivan Pankratov had gone out sometimes, and walked around the town thinking that he was enjoying an easy and worthy old age. And now it turned out that they had kept him on at the printing works, him the chatterbox and boaster, for no reason at all, that they had worked for him and fed him.... And now, because of his helplessness, because of him.... His heart palpitated wearily. Surely the town could not be allowed to fall because of him!

Mishka kept screaming at him.

"Get it set!..." There was no limit to Mishka's curses.

Ivan Pankratov pulled frantically at the type case—the third box from the top. The table gave a jerk. Ivan set his stick to the width of the handbill and pulled the type case down on the table with a crash. He immediately picked out the letter "T"—all manifestoes began with the letter "T", but then it seemed to him that he had not got that letter but another, either the one before or the one after it. He glanced at the letter. It felt cold, heavy and dull, as though it was completely worn down, rubbed out. He glanced helplessly at the window and that, too, seemed to have been rubbed into a pink mist of cobwebs. He held the letter closer to his eyes. The indistinct and unreadable outline of the letter gleamed between his fingers; in the mist that surrounded them they looked oddly smooth and young. But he could not tell what letter it was, he had absolutely no idea!... The stick trembled in his hand.

No idea?... That meant there was nothing he could do, no way he, a printer, an old worker, could help the working class and the poor peasantry, who were defending the socialist revolution.... Was it possible that he, an old worker, could not muster enough strength to see the letters? Was it possible that in these minutes, when the fate of many Soviet people was being decided, he would be incapable of doing anything? Had he really become so weak-willed? That could not, must not, be!

His mind was working feverishly. He felt a shiver of cold in his toes. His head was burning. His throat was dry. He would do his job, he would manage somehow, he would make himself see the letters!

Then his brain suddenly seemed to catch fire. The joy of creative effort suddenly made him straighten his back. Tears streamed from his eyes, and seemed to sweep away the mist that had veiled them. He could see the type case and the letters quite clearly....

"Tovarishchi!" (Comrades). This was the first word he would set on his stick, using the biggest type he had.

The letter he had held in the palm of his hand now returned to his fingers; they had become more flexible, and looking at them, it struck him that he had not noticed the wrinkles on his fingers for a long time. But there was no time to think about wrinkles now. When he could not see properly he had taken the letter "S" from the next box instead of the letter "T". He threw the "S" back into its box.

"That was a mistake," he said. His hand described a semicircle between the type case and the stick as his fingers firmly grasped the letter "T", then "O" and then "V"....

Mishka walked slowly away from the type case, looked round the shop fearfully, for some unknown reason smoothed his hair down, and then began to

get the form ready to take the type from Ivan's galley; the form, with the type, is placed in the printing-press, and then the printing can begin. At first Mishka took the cleanest form he could find, then he grew bolder and winked maliciously to himself—I know that old man's just lazy, he seemed to say, he's been fooling them all the time. So, he took up the dirtiest and rustiest of the forms. Ivan Pankratov, still filled with this extraordinary sense of joy and even aching with it (there was a sharp pain in his chest and his temples throbbed), hurriedly shot one stick of type after another into the galley. He thought he had missed out a word; he checked it, re-read the text and found everything correct. He began putting type in the stick again, and again it seemed to him that he had missed some very important word. He spat, tied up the type in the galley, put it into the hand press and pulled the handle, so that the roller would run over the type and ink it. His hands were wet with sweat, his face was steaming.

"Let her go!" shouted Mishka, putting a sheet of wallpaper into the press (they had only wallpaper to print the manifesto on).

Ivan Pankratov saw a galley proof of his own setting for the first time in—how many years? But he had no time for reminiscences, for Mishka was shouting at him.

"Read the proofs, Uncle Ivan!"

He found a misprint, an "E" instead of an "I", and wanted to dig it out with a pick and change it, but suddenly he could not see the sharp end of the pick; the lever of the hand press disappeared from his sight, and first his fingers, then his arm retreated into the haze. He dropped the pick and grasping the lever of the press firmly looked round the shop. There was no shop any more. A dull reddish mist was his whole world.

"Put the paper in, Mishka," he said.

Mishka whistled, and told him to set the press going. Soon some soldiers came running to the printing works for the manifestoes and they handed them the lot—seventy copies—forgetting to leave one for themselves. Half an hour later the Cossacks filled the trenches. Machine-guns were aimed into the desert. The *basmachi* retreated. And another five hours later the steamer reached the Amu Darya through the newly dug canal. The whole town greeted the steamer. People took Ivan Pankratov by the arms and led him out to meet it (why they were leading him and how he did not notice). The Cossacks roared a united and somewhat boastful "Hurrah!" at it. It was still raining and the tiny drops were falling on Ivan's face.

"See what a big ship it is?" someone asked him.

"Yes, I do," he answered, although before him there stretched an endless sea of fog with a tiny, gleaming circle in the middle—the sun.

Translated by George H. Hanna

ABDULLA KAHHAR

Abdulla Kahhar, the son of a wandering blacksmith, was born in 1907 in Kokand, one of the oldest Uzbek cities. He spent his childhood in various villages of the Ferghana Valley, where his father, a *kuchmanchi*, or vagabond, sought work. Abdulla was more fortunate than his father, for the first Soviet rural school with the alluring name of "Future" set him on the road to a new life. His writings first appeared in the press in 1925; he later worked on newspapers, had stories published in the journal *Soviet Literature* and for several years headed the Uzbek Union of Writers.

His stories have been translated into many of the languages of the Soviet Union.

Abdulla Kahhar is also well known for his translations of the works of Gorky, Pushkin, Gogol and Lev Tolstoi's great epic *War and Peace*. He has been awarded U.S.S.R. and Uzbek Republican literary prizes.

THE HEALER OF THE BLIND

Can that be you, Mullah Umar?
Is it you the hunter's arrow awaits?
From an old song.

And so Ahmad Palwan* awaited death. Perhaps it would be better to say that death awaited Ahmad Palwan.... He had not the least desire to be translated to another world, but, trussed up like a sheep and placed side by side with the sergeant who had been ordered to carry out the execution, how could he cry "Yes" in one direction and "No" in the other?

The executioner was a short but thickset youth. When he pushed him, Palwan swayed like a slender reed and fell over backwards, pressing under him arms tied crosswise behind his back.

With a hefty kick the executioner forced Palwan to his feet.

As he rose Palwan twitched his shoulders to see whether anything was sprained or broken but suddenly, with sour humility, remembered that now neither breaks nor sprains had any meaning for him.

The executioner gave Palwan another shove, a lighter one this time, and he ran or rather hobbled a few steps that brought him directly in front of the earthen dais, where, on cushions, lay the head of the gang—the one-eyed *kurbashi*—in an extremely greasy striped robe. To the right of the *kurbashi* sat their religious mentor, the hunchbacked *ulem*, to his left sat the yellow-faced Indian doctor, the *tabib*, while behind him the owner of the house had found a place for himself—he was a little fidgety old man who looked like a bat.

* Palwan—strong man, Titan.—*Tr.*

The *kurbashi* had only just finished a whole dish of pilau, spots of grease shone on his pock-marked cheeks and grains of rice showed white in his thick, uncombed beard. At any other time one savage glance from him was enough to strike fear into the most fearless of men but at that moment, when greasy satiety made his belly heavy, he was limp and weak of will. Unconquerable sleepiness was getting a grip on all the muscles of the heavy body in which he tried in vain to arouse a dormant fury.

With the greatest of difficulty opening his one good eye that at that moment could see next to nothing at all, the *kurbashi* filled his lungs with air and shouted with all his might:

"Spawn of hell! How much longer have we got to wait for the names of your confederates?"

Ahmad Palwan still retained his former silence. Could he add the slightest thing to what had already been said? He had certainly killed Ismail Effendi, but he had had no confederates, except the axe.

The *kurbashi* had regarded Ismail as his chief lieutenant and, indeed, the effendi had been the right wing of the vulture. When a bullet from a red-starred cavalryman had pierced Ismail Effendi's breast near Alkar Mazar the *kurbashi* had seized him out of the very thick of the battle, thrown him across his saddle and galloped away to the mountains with him. If the chase had not been so hot the *kurbashi* would have bound the wounds of his faithful lieutenant but the horsemen with the red stars on their high, pointed helmets had pursued the runaways so stubbornly that a halt, even for a moment, had been out of the question.

It was night by the time the *kurbashi*, after losing a half of his horsemen, reached the mountain village where Ahmad Palwan lived. The effendi was bleeding profusely and he asked them not to take him

any farther but to leave him in the house of some reliable man.

The *kurbashi* had two or three followers in that village that he trusted implicitly. But the effendi could not be placed in any of their houses because they were bais and the *kurbashi* knew full well that the red-star soldiers were hostile then by way of precaution to all the rich and respected bais. The *kurbashi* reasoned with justice that the most reliable refuge for the effendi would be the house of a poor man and decided to leave the dying man in Palwan's pitiful hovel.

Ahmad Palwan took the effendi directly from the hands of the *kurbashi* and promised not only to look after the wounded man but to ensure him undisturbed quiet. Palwan kept his promise even before the clip-clop of the horses' hoofs had died away in the intense darkness of the night as the *kurbashi* and his horsemen rode off to safer places.

Ahmad Palwan did not await the recovery or death of the effendi: afraid that the *kurbashi* might return and take his friend away he soothed the wounded man with a blow from a heavy axe—soothed him for all eternity.

Thirty-seven days after the body of the effendi had been buried in a deep pit the *kurbashi*, who had learned of Palwan's act from one of the village bais, seized and bound Ahmad, and threw him across a saddle like a sack. Palwan was shaken up travelling this way on the horse for two days in order to make payment for the blood of the friend and faithful lieutenant of the *kurbashi*, the leader of the bandit gang, exactly forty days after the effendi's death.

Now he stood face to face with the enemy and awaited his word.

But the *kurbashi* did not speak because the tension he had had to work up to give full play to his

avenging fury had exhausted all his strength. Defeated by sleep, he dropped his head on his breast and his snores reached the ears of the hunchbacked *ulem* and the yellow-faced *tabib* and the little batlike old man.

As they sat on the dais the *ulem*, the *tabib* and the fidgety old man looked at each other in consternation but tried not to look at the executioner and the dismounted horsemen who were sick of this tiresome waiting.

And then the *ulem* mustered up courage enough to give the *kurbashi* a shove. He shuddered, threw back his head, glanced at the sky and remembered that at sundown he had to lead his horsemen in a raid on the neighbouring village where some accounts with hostile peasants had been left unsettled too long. As the sun was already low and no more than two or three hours remained to sunset the *kurbashi* decided that it was time to put an end to that scoundrel. His single eye, gleaming like that of a wolf, was fixed on Palwan.

Palwan met his menacing gaze unflinchingly and did not lower his tired but very determined eyes.

Heaving his body violently forward the *kurbashi* shouted at the top of his voice:

"Filthy unbeliever! Do you imagine that life or maybe two lives stand behind your back and not the executioner?!"

Palwan twitched his swollen fingers behind his back and looked the *kurbashi* straight in the face.

"My prince!" he exclaimed. "I have said everything and there is nothing left for me to say. The effendi killed poor people, I killed him and now you are going to kill me.... But before my life is cut short I would like to do that which will find favour with Allah, that Allah may...."

"You lousy fool!" screamed the *kurbashi*, "don't you dare take the holy name in vain!"

"How could I dream of blasphemy?" smiled Palwan, sadly. "No, prince, in my last hour I must think of other things. I humbly pray you, prince, permit me to do a deed that is pleasing to Allah and which will also be of advantage to you, o wise prince!"

"What advantage can I gain from you?" roared the *kurbashi* fiercely.

"My prince," said Palwan, "you are as strong as a lion and I am as weak as a bee. But do you not know that the lion almost perished when he ignored the bee? Do not disdain me, mighty prince, and I will reveal a secret to you."

The *kurbashi*'s face was distorted with a spasm of either wrath or laughter but he suppressed it and turned it into a yawn. The *kurbashi* showed himself unwilling to continue the conversation and snapped out in an angry voice:

"I can see right through you, dog!"

"You see me now with one eye but you could see me with two!" objected Palwan firmly and, seeing the anger and perplexity in the *kurbashi*'s face, added slowly: "My prince, your left eye has been deprived of light because of the dark water that poured into it. But I can bring back the light of your unseeing eye for I know the secret of healing the blind."

When he heard the word "healing" the Indian *tabib*, who did not properly understand the Uzbek language, suddenly became agitated and asked the *ulem* what the doomed man had said.

The *ulem*, sprinkling his Uzbek speech with the spice of Arabic words, explained the sense of what had been said and the *tabib* threw off his indifference and looked at Palwan with great attention.

"Of course, he's lying," he thought but immediately doubted his own doubts and asked himself sternly: "What if this man's big lie should contain a grain of truth?"

The *kurbashi* suddenly turned to the *tabib.*

"*Tabib,*" he said, "I make you a gift of that lousy fellow's secret. You do not know much about the art of healing since you cannot drive out of your own body the disease that sets you shaking three times a week like the devil shakes a sinner. Take this secret of the healing of the blind and may it serve to make your art greater!"

The *kurbashi* roared with laughter and lay back on the cushions that the fidgety little master of the house had put there just in time. If it had not been for those cushions the *kurbashi* would probably have burst from laughter, so violently did his enormous belly heave. The *kurbashi*'s sudden fit of merriment infected the others and even the stern-faced *ulem* could not restrain a smile while the little old man who looked like a bat was just one big laugh. The *tabib* alone did not take part in that unseemly mirth.

At last the *kurbashi* grew calm.

"I'm fed up with listening to the tales of that fool!" he said when he had regained his breath. "You talk to him, *tabib*!"

The *kurbashi* made himself comfortable on the cushions, wiped his perspiring face with a handkerchief and added with an evil leer:

"If it comes to that a cat doesn't immediately kill the mouse it has caught but plays with it first.... We can also play a little, can't we, *tabib*?"

The *tabib* nodded in answer and turned to Palwan.

"Have you ever succeeded in healing a single blind man?" he asked sternly.

"No," answered Ahmad Palwan, simply. "I have never healed anybody myself but my old teacher once gave light back to a blind man. The blind man saw and the old man became blind himself and died."

"What did he die of?"

"He died because he had given his light to the blind man."

Ahmad Palwan again twitched his numb fingers and added calmly:

"I shall go blind, too, when I give my light to the prince's blind eye."

The *tabib* pretended that he was not in the least surprised at this answer and then asked him still more sternly:

"What was your teacher's name?"

Palwan answered that he would name his teacher later when everybody had seen that he, Ahmad Palwan, was really able to effect a cure.

The *tabib* nodded his head again and was lost in thought. He was more filled with superstition than knowledge although he did know something of the doctor's art.

He thought that what Palwan had told him was impossible, monstrous even, but he recalled the admonitions he had heard long ago from his teachers who always maintained that in nature no line can be drawn between the possible and the impossible. Only a man as ignorant as that brainless *kurbashi* could make fun of a *tabib* who could not cure his own malaria. Even the greatest *hakims* bowed humbly before disease. But could that which was hidden from the initiated possibly be revealed to the uninitiated?

The *tabib* glanced at Palwan and made a sudden decision: come what may he would not let the opportunity pass.

Speaking haltingly in a language that was strange to him he asked Palwan what drugs or herbs he would need to treat the *kurbashi.*

Palwan replied that he would need six forget-me-not blossoms, two persimmon fruits, one egg, a spoonful of honey and a pinch of caraway seeds. The fidgety old man, a house-proud old bai, had

everything that was wanted with the exception of the forget-me-nots and one of the horsemen was sent for them.

"Is there anything else you need?" asked the *tabib*.

"Yes," answered Palwan, "I shall need a copper kettle and a candle."

The old man brought these things and Palwan asked that the candle be stuck in such a position that it was opposite the *kurbashi*'s blind eye; he ordered the kettle to be placed on the fire and two tea bowls of water poured into it.

All that was done.

When the water was boiling in the kettle Palwan asked the *tabib* to dissolve the honey in it, empty the egg into it and then drop in the persimmons and the caraways.

Palwan asked that the horseman sitting by the kettle stirring the brew be given the forget-me-nots that the other had brought. When he had them Palwan ordered him to count six blossoms and drop them into the brew.

The *tabib* did not take his wary eyes off Palwan. He tried to remember the sequence of the operations but at the same time was torn by doubts.

"If only this man should prove to possess the secret!" he thought and thereupon began counting up the benefits that would accrue to him when the great secret became his property. Firstly, he would no longer need the patronage of the *kurbashi* and would be able to get rid of him without the aid of somebody else's dagger or bullet but by the swift aid of poison. Why, indeed, should he seek the grace of this merciless chieftain of a bandit gang when any city in India would consider itself fortunate to be able to throw open its gates to the possessor of such a great secret? Why, he would even be able to return to his native city whence he had been

exiled as a charlatan and ignoramus through the dastardly intrigues of the other *tabibs*. What would all those infamous and envious *tabibs* say now, and what would the highly educated *hakims* say, and where would they hide their shameless eyes when they saw him return, mighty and famous, the greatest of the *tabibs* that this world had ever known?

In this way or something like it the Indian *tabib*'s thoughts ran on as he gazed at the wisp of blue steam that rose above the kettle.

Palwan was also watching the kettle.

When the blue steam began to curl and then turn white Palwan ordered the men to remove the kettle and to bring stones that had never been touched by water.

"Bring the stones," ordered the *kurbashi* who had suddenly realised that before he undertook the raid on the neighbouring village he would have to excite his horsemen with a spectacle that he, their *kurbashi*, would culminate with an amusing but bloody trick.

Three of the horsemen brought stones in the skirts of their robes and piled them at the feet of Ahmad Palwan.

He asked to be shown each stone separately and at last selected a stone weighing seven or eight pounds.

"I am not sure that water has never touched that stone," he said and ordered them to shape it until it possessed the form of the iron share of a wooden plough.

"Do as he says!" ordered the *kurbashi* and a hefty young horseman got to work with a hammer such as are used to dress millstones.

Palwan then turned to the *tabib*.

"*Hakim*," he said, "I now need human blood!"

"Where can I get it?" asked the *tabib* in a worried voice and glanced at the *kurbashi*.

The latter stared intently at Palwan.

"I'll give you the blood!" said Palwan turning to the *kurbashi*. "Prince, order the executioner to lop off my finger," he added.

Smothered exclamations rolled across the huge courtyard and then died away.

The *kurbashi* ran his fingers through his curly beard and then, as though thinking aloud, said:

"In that case we shall have to untie your hands!"

"What! Are you afraid of me, prince?" asked Palwan and stared him boldly in the face.

The fingers gripped the beard and tugged at it, the *kurbashi*'s cheeks flushed red and that made the pock-marks more prominent.

"Untie the pig!" shouted the *kurbashi*. "Untie that pig! Let two of my men stand with bared swords, one on either side of him! And you, executioner, unsheathe your sword and watch him closely!"

The three men with unsheathed swords surrounded Palwan, and the rope, cut with a knife, dropped to the ground. Palwan raised his arms and shook his hands over his head.

"Bring a block of wood and a small bowl!" he ordered, rubbing the weals on his wrists.

They brought the block and the bowl and Palwan told them by signs where to put them.

"Get ready, executioner!" he said softly. "When I shout 'Chop!' you must chop!"

The executioner muttered something inaudibly.

"*Hakim*!" Palwan called to the *tabib*. "Stand here and hold the bowl!"

The *tabib* came down from the dais, took the bowl and stood where he was told.

Palwan knelt down, folded to his palm four fingers of his left hand, leaving the little finger extended, and placed it on the block.

So intense was the silence throughout the house and courtyard of the fidgety old man that the flutter-

ing of the wings of a passing butterfly could be clearly heard.

The hunchbacked *ulem* suddenly felt faint, he turned pale and covered his face with his hands. Most likely he did not hear the shout of "Chop!" or the whistle of the sword through the air.

When he opened his eyes Palwan had already straightened up to his full height and the *tabib* was sprinkling some powder on the wound to stop the bleeding. Palwan's face glistened with large drops of perspiration and he was breathing heavily and noisily.

The *ulem* saw with the corner of his eye that the bowl was no longer empty but full of something and turned quickly away. At that very moment Palwan's half-closed eyelids quivered. He glanced at his hand and saw that the bleeding was getting less.

"Is the stone ready?" he asked.

"Is the stone ready?" repeated the *kurbashi*, like an echo, waved his hand and added impatiently, "Bring it here."

Up to that moment the *kurbashi* had not doubted that Palwan was making a fool of him in an attempt to avoid death but now he almost certainly believed that this incomprehensible man was capable of returning the sight of his blind eye. An indistinct feeling of pity, or, rather, the shadow of pity, flickered in the *kurbashi*'s savage heart and there was less fury in his glance as he looked at Palwan.

Palwan continued to give instructions and his orders were obeyed as though they had been given by the *kurbashi* himself.

The giant horseman brought the stone already dressed in the form of a plough share and the *tabib*, following Palwan's instructions, smeared it with the brew from the kettle. The slow movement that gave the *tabib* an air of importance had been abandoned and he moved and worked with unusual alacrity as

he now had no doubts about Palwan and believed that the great secret would be his, the *tabib*'s, who had grown weary of his difficult and dangerous service in the *kurbashi*'s bandit gang.

The *tabib* took the stone and went with it to a place open to the wind because Palwan had said that the stone must dry. It was just at this moment that the *tabib* remembered Palwan saying that the man who possessed the secret of healing the blind must lose his own sight in returning the sight of a blind man. The very thought of this so frightened the *tabib* that he stumbled and almost dropped the stone. But then another thought came to him: "I shall only heal the rich and then I shall be rich myself and shall have so much money that any beggar will be willing to go blind in my place. . . ."

This thought cheered him up and he put the stone in a place open to the wind and looked inquiringly at Palwan.

"I'll do everything else myself," said Ahmad Palwan and the *tabib*, with the mien of a man who has performed an arduous task, climbed on the dais. Palwan followed him with his eyes, lowered the mutilated hand that had by then stopped bleeding to the level of his shoulder and turned to the *kurbashi*. "If the prince will permit it," he said respectfully, "I will rest while the stone is drying!"

"Sit down, sit down!" the *kurbashi* hurried to say, and those surrounding him would have heard kindness in his voice if only that hoarse bark had been able to take on a tender sound.

Palwan sat down on his heels between his three guardians and wearily bowed his head. If it were not for the mutilated hand lying on his knee, an onlooker might have thought of him as a peasant who had sat down for a brief respite after which he would again begin work in his garden or field. The

incomprehensible calm of the doomed man astonished and, perhaps, even alarmed the *kurbashi*.

Until then he had believed that he knew the innermost recesses of the human soul. He had killed soldiers in battle and ploughmen in their fields, he had spilled blood on the sand of caravan routes and on the trampled ground of villages, he had robbed men and women of their lives, at times not even troubling to find out who was right and who was wrong—the *kurbashi* had killed thousands of people in this way. Hundreds of prisoners had stood before him in the same way as this elderly peasant now stood but he remembered very few of the many because but few of that many had dared curse and malign him before they died.

If for no other reason Ahmad Palwan was incomprehensible because he did not curse and did not beg for mercy but argued rationally and respectfully.

When the *kurbashi* saw how calmly that incomprehensible man was enjoying his rest he ran over in his mind all the tortures that he knew but could not think of one that was likely to disturb Palwan's unusual tranquillity.

"If that unfeeling devil would consent to join my horsemen he would be as good as ten others!" thought the *kurbashi* and rage, mixed with admiration, ate at his heart, for he knew that one can break a stone but can't twist it.

Stroking his beard the *kurbashi* continued turning the heavy millstones of his thoughts in this way until the *ulem* leaned towards his shoulder.

"Time is passing, prince!" he whispered and the *kurbashi* shook himself like a dozing miller, and shouted threateningly:

"Hi, you! Isn't it time you got on with it?"

"Yes, my prince!" answered Palwan, slowly raising his head. "The stone is probably dry.... Let them bring it here."

The giant horseman hurriedly carried out the order. Palwan took the stone from him and slowly felt its triangular pointed end.

"My prince!" he began, placing the stone at his feet. "Before I begin my treatment I should like to ask. . . ."

"That I should grant you your life?" the *kurbashi* said, interrupting him, and evil triumph made his one seeing eye gleam. "That is impossible, my jester! That is impossible because you have the blood of the effendi on your hands. . . ."

"You are right, my prince!" said Palwan, humbly, as though he admitted the truth of what the *kurbashi* said. "But tell me what the effendi had been before he became your right hand?"

"He had been a true Muslim believer and the soldier of a Muslim ruler!" answered the *kurbashi* importantly, even impressively.

"I had heard of that," admitted Palwan, simply. "But I also heard that after the ruler of that foreign land was driven out of his white palace on the sea-shore, the effendi did not wish to return to his native land."

The *kurbashi* nodded his head warily.

"That's how it was . . ." continued Palwan still in the same artless tones. "And so the effendi left his native land and remained in foreign parts, in our country, that is? Don't bother to answer, I'll tell you myself. . . . The effendi rode beside you, prince, and with you he set fire to our villages, killed and plundered. . . ."

From his low place Palwan looked up at the *kurbashi* and shouted rapidly:

"That's what I killed him for!"

"Dog! Filthy swine!" screamed the *kurbashi* hoarsely, fumbling spasmodically for the hilt of his dagger.

"The cure!. . . You have forgotten the cure!"

howled the *tabib* on his left while the *ulem* on his right added his voice, pointing to Palwan with his yellow hand and whining softly:

"Don't let him deceive you, prince! Can't you see, the scoundrel is seeking an easy death?"

"You are right, my *ulem.* And you, too, *tabib*!. . ." growled the *kurbashi,* breathing heavily. "But let that dog take care how he plays with the knife! D'you hear me, villain?"

"I hear you, my prince!" replied Palwan with his former, perhaps with even greater, respect. "Forgive me, prince, but I only wanted to know whether your anger was still aflame."

"What do you want to know that for?" the *kurbashi* could not help asking.

"Because I am not so much afraid of your anger as I am of your kindness. . . ."

Again the *kurbashi* could not contain himself and asked in astonishment:

"I don't understand. . . ."

"You will understand soon!" objected Palwan. "I want to cure you, don't I? Then I have reason to fear that when the spark of light illumines your darkened eye you may, out of gratitude, grant me my life."

"I see you are a misguided jester!" muttered the *kurbashi* angrily.

"Wait a moment, prince, I haven't finished yet. . . ."

"Speak up! But briefly."

"Good, my prince! Here is my mutilated hand and here are my eyes. When I have given you their light. . . ."

"I understand!" said the *kurbashi,* interrupting him. "What next?"

"I do not wish you to grant me my life. . . . What is the life of a beggar who has to seek alms in the market-place?"

"Your words sound wise enough," said the *kurbashi* and suddenly burst out laughing. "But what made you think I would grant you your life?"

Palwan, who had been sitting on his heels all this time, now stood up and stared into the *kurbashi*'s smiling face.

"I have my doubts, my prince!" he said.

"Oh no, you have no doubts!" said the *kurbashi* with malignant assurance. "You know that I shall kill you as soon as the treatment is over.... That is why you are not hurrying with your treatment, isn't it, my jester?"

"That is not so, my prince. I am ready to begin the treatment, but first I must be sure...."

"Of what?"

"That you will kill me...."

"Didn't I say...."

"I hear you, my prince...."

"Then what do you want?"

"I want to say a few words to your men."

"What for?"

"To make you angry."

"I'm angry already."

"I want you to be still more angry."

"And if I do not allow you to say foolish words to my men?"

Palwan smiled and answered with another question:

"Can you be afraid of my foolish words?"

The *kurbashi* turned red, nodded towards the guards and muttered, as though he were asking himself:

"And what if I were to tell my men to sharpen their swords on one foolish head?"

"And what if one dark eye were to remain for ever dark?" asked Palwan.

The *kurbashi* jumped up on his cushions and filled the courtyard with his roaring voice:

"Devil! Spew up your foul words as quickly as you can!"

"Good, my prince!" said Ahmad Palwan and with elusive rapidity changing his tone from one of audacity to humility he took a step back from the *kurbashi.*

"Don't talk to me, not to me!" howled the *kurbashi* and with a wave of his hand indicated the men who were watching what was going on with avid attention.

Palwan turned to the men who were sitting shoulder to shoulder on the ground and they saw his face as it was lit up by the slanting rays of the sun.

"People!" he exclaimed in a strong, clear voice. "You are looking at me and wondering. 'That fool,' you think, 'has given a finger and is now going to give up the light of his eyes to his worst enemy, the prince!' Don't be surprised at that, people, because I am giving up only a finger and my sight and you are giving up yourselves to be torn to pieces by the enemy. You are shooting yourselves when you kill your fathers and your brothers and burn down your own villages. Don't imagine that I have gone mad from fear! Let them scrape the flesh off my bones, let them grind my bones under a millstone, I am prepared for anything if only the truth of my words reaches your understanding. Within a quarter of an hour I shall be dead.... But before I die I want to know for whose sake you gallop about the country with a rifle slung across your back and deal bloody wounds to your own brothers, to people as poor as yourselves. Tell me, people, for whose sake have you given up the honest farmer's plough for the dishonest rifle?"

"Silence, hold your tongue, you scoundrel!" screamed the infuriated *kurbashi,* but Palwan did

not even look at him and continued in a still louder and stronger voice:

"When our people have finished off all the counter-revolutionary bandit gangs, the rich men, the fat-bellied bais, will be scared to death.... But you, you who have nothing, what are you afraid of?"

The *kurbashi* was black with anger and he gave the executioner a sign to strike Palwan with the flat of his sword but not with the edge. The executioner blindly obeyed the order and Palwan staggered but managed to keep on his feet.

Then the *kurbashi* with a single movement of his shoulders shook off the hands of the *tabib* and the flabby paws of the *ulem,* walked to the edge of the dais and grunted straight into Palwan's face:

"I've been listening to your babbling long enough. Now you listen to me. You, jester, will not die from the blow of a sword as I had formerly planned but from a knife that is as strong as a wild boar's tusk. But before you die the *tabib* will carefully remove your skin and I will have it stretched on a drum and first you will hear how the drum rumbles under my blows and after that you will see the knife with which the executioner will cut your throat. I have spoken and there is nothing more to be said. You stop your barking and get on with your business!..."

Palwan bowed and made a sign that he be given the bowl. The sign was understood and Palwan wetted the stone with the contents of the bowl. The other signs he gave were not understood no matter how hard Palwan tried and the *kurbashi* cursed him and told him to explain in words what he wanted.

Palwan ordered the men to bring straw and twist it into wisps. Then he called the *tabib* and the owner of the house to him.

"You take a wisp, master, and you, *hakim*, take the stone!" he said.

When that had been done he told the little old man to set fire to the wisp and hold it near the *kurbashi*'s face.

"That may damage the prince's sound eye!" objected the old man.

"Then bind the sound eye with a handkerchief!" ordered Palwan and when that had been done he ordered the *tabib* and the old man to kneel down before the *kurbashi.*

"Now light the candle and see that it keeps burning and does not go out," he said.

They lit the candle and Palwan looked at the flickering flame.

"*Hakim*," he said turning to the *tabib*, "point the sharp end of the stone towards the blind eye and rock it like this."

Palwan showed him by signs what he had to do and the *tabib* tossed the stone up a few times and then began to rock it to and fro.

"More smoothly, gently!" shouted Palwan. "Remember how a mother rocks her baby."

The *tabib* did not seem to have ever seen how a mother rocks her baby because Palwan kept shouting at him, "Gently, gently, smoothly. . . ."

No matter how hard the *tabib* tried, Palwan kept shouting at him:

"Not that way, not like that, *hakim*! Begin again!"

In the meantime the little old man had set fire to the fourth wisp and the smoke from the burning straw was suffocating the *kurbashi* as he eagerly awaited the cure.

At last he could stand it no longer and, irritated by the clumsiness of the *tabib*, shouted angrily:

"Give him the stone, *tabib*! Let him do it himself the way he wants!"

The *ulem* again leaned over the shoulder of the *kurbashi* and whispered something in his ear. He was most likely warning his master that his action was lacking in caution because the *kurbashi* cursed him.

"What have I to fear from that abortion?" he said, angrily. "What are the executioner and my two men with their swords there for? Let them draw nearer and bring him here!"

They led Palwan on to the dais and the swordsmen came up close to him.

Palwan fell on his knees before the *kurbashi* and said:

"My prince! So that your wise *ulem* should have no doubts let them bind my eyes, too."

"Bind them," said the *kurbashi*, coughing from the smoke.

"*Hakim*, give me the stone," said Palwan when his eyes had been bound.

The *tabib* pushed the stone into his outstretched hands and stepped aside, confused.

"Watch the candle, *hakim*!" said Palwan. "And make sure that the pointed end of the stone is always opposite the blind eye. I am beginning, my prince!"

... Slowly and smoothly Palwan rocked the stone back and forth; this swaying motion made the straw burn more fiercely so that the smoke became thicker and thicker, hiding the heads of Ahmad Palwan and the *kurbashi*. The candle flame flickered and wavered behind the back of the healer; the *tabib* and all those present with him watched the flame and at the same time kept an eye on Palwan's hands.

The movement of those hands was so accurate despite the fact that he was blindfolded that the pointed end of the stone was all the time directly opposite the blind eye. When the point went slightly

off its mark the *tabib* did not have time to warn him for the healer immediately shouted: "Candle!" and for an instant everybody, the *tabib* included, looked at the candle.

It was precisely in this instant that the sharpened point of the stone smashed through the *kurbashi*'s temple.

The next instant the executioner's sword whistled through the air and dead Palwan fell on to the body of the dead *kurbashi*.

Before the executioner had time to wipe his sword he was killed by a bullet from one of the horsemen.

This first shot was followed by a second and a third: the followers of the dead *kurbashi* began killing one another in a furious battle that lasted until midnight.

At midnight the house belonging to the little old man who looked like a bat caught fire and a huge beacon rose into the air informing the neighbouring villages of the death of the *kurbashi* who had been known to very many people by the name of "The One-Eyed Tiger".

Translated by George H. Hanna

VERA INBER

Vera Inber, a Soviet poetess who is also well known for her prose works, was born in Odessa in 1890. The four-volume edition of her *Selected Works* contains lyrics, long poems, and stories of all kinds, including children's stories. Among her best-known works are the long poem *The Pulkovo Meridian* and her Leningrad diary published under the title *Almost Three Years*, in which she described the life of Leningrad in the days of the siege.

Among Vera Inber's prose works a prominent place is held by her tales of life in Soviet Turkmenia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where she lived for many years.

The story which follows, *The Crime of Nor Bibi*, tells of a young woman who was emancipated by the new government, and found freedom and happiness.

THE CRIME OF NOR BIBI

I

As Nor Bibi lies sleeping in her *beshik*, the hanging cradle, her mother sings softly to her.

Sleep, my sweetest!
You will grow up,
You'll have two sewing machines,
One worked by hand and one by foot,
O daughter mine.

Are you sleeping, sweetest?
Your many braids will glisten
And the sweetest of raisins
Will you eat from a tray,
O daughter mine.

Your tiny mites you'll feed
With the daintiest soup.
Not as I feed you, I who
Never have bread enough,
O daughter mine.

Let your well-fed children play,
Like lambs in the field,
And they shall not die
As my children die,
O daughter mine.

Nor Bibi's father sold little hollowed-out pumpkins in the Samarkand bazaar. They were fastened with horsehair tassels and were used to contain chewing tobacco ground to a powder.

When the pumpkins were small and still very soft, they had a string tied round them to give them the required shape as they grew.

"It's the same with us people," Nor Bibi's father liked to repeat, "poverty holds us tightly bound and shapes us as it will."

Nor Bibi was growing. Soon she was eight, almost of marriageable age. She could not read and had seen nothing of life; except for the one occasion when her father had taken her to the bazaar, to the Street of the Capmakers, she had lived all the time with her family, some four kilometres from Samarkand not far from the Mosque of Hoja Ahrar (which she was forbidden to enter) on the road to Aghalyq.

The interior of the mosque was beautiful. The cells of the *madrasah*, the religious seminary attached to the mosque, opened on to a clean and quiet courtyard. In these cells lived the cold, pious youths who were to become imams. The interesting thing about the courtyard was that a word whispered at one end travelled as on wings to the listener at the other end. This was not a freak—the wise builders had deliberately planned it so that the holy man, the mullah, could preach the wisdom of Allah without straining his precious throat.

By the time Nor Bibi was ten years old, she was being taught all the feminine arts and crafts—to plait hair into tiny thin braids, to be meek and submissive, to paint her eyebrows, to grate onions for pancakes, to nurse children and to help her mother feed the silkworms.

In the spring, when the leaves of the mulberry were just beginning to move inside their buds, her mother did what her mother and her mother's mother had done before her—she hung a bag of graine next to her bare body, so that its warmth would bring to life the tiny silkworm eggs. She carried the bag in her arm-pit and watched the eggs, which were no bigger than poppy seeds, with

great care; when they became lighter in colour she knew that the tiny worms would soon appear.

How badly Nor Bibi's mother needed that "silkworm money"! What great hopes this poverty-stricken household placed in the cocoon harvest! It is true they got very little for them; the buyer-up bought the cocoons for next to nothing and sent them abroad, and from there they would come back to Russia bearing a foreign trade mark and called "raw silk". All that, however, was something that was going to happen in the distant future and in the meantime the parents' chief concern was to observe all the ancient customs that promised them good luck.

On market day the father took a pinch of the graine to a field of clover and threw it on the ground, so that there should be as many cocoons as there were people in the bazaar and clover in the field.

The worms grow quickly. They go to sleep four times and each time they sleep for twenty-four hours. In these periods they slough their skins and become bigger and bigger. In the last period of their life they are ten thousand times bigger than when they left their eggs.

They are kept on special shelves, one above the other, that occupy the whole room. The family now move into the yard where there is a summer fireplace with a roof over it. Out here in the bright sunlight poverty makes itself more keenly felt—dirty wadding is hanging out of torn quilts, the *qumghan* or copper cooking pots are battered and smoke-blackened and the earthenware pots are cracked.

The mother watched over the silk of the future in alarm. But the eggs, hatched in the oppressive dampness of an unwashed body that sweated from sheer exhaustion, produced weak, sickly silkworms.

"More bad luck," sighed the mother each time they shed their skins. "Again they go to sleep and do not wake up in time. And what a mixed lot they are, it makes you cry to look at them! There are going to be a lot of spotted ones among them and a lot of twins that won't unwind."

Not that any of this had much to do with Nor Bibi. Her job was to collect mulberry leaves. She clambered up the tree, caught hold of the thin end of a branch with one hand and tore the leaves off it with the other, putting them all in a wicker basket. When her arms grew tired, she simply sat in the tree like a bird and watched another bird, a stork, who lived in an ancient black beech-tree growing nearby. She watched that feathered family and discovered that it had much in common with her own. There were many children there, too, and they were always hungry. The mother bird sat at home all the time. The difference was in fathers. The father bird hardly ever came home without bringing a frog from the neighbouring pond. And Nor Bibi imagined her father with his thin, care-worn face, flying through the air. His arms were propelling him, his striped gown was spread out in the air and under one arm he held a lump of mutton. With a loud shout of joy he flew down on to the earthen wall surrounding their courtyard and from there on to the ground. In the meantime she imagined her mother picking over the rice to make pilau. What a fairy-tale!

Fairy-tale time, however, was passing. Nor Bibi was twelve years old. Now we see her sitting in the courtyard with the other girls, painting her eyebrows. The girls take water from a canal in a broken cup and mix the paint in it. They dip a little stick into the paint and draw it across the bridge of the nose to join the two brows into one. They incline their heads, first to the right, then to

the left; blue streams run down their cheeks but no one wipes them away for fear of spoiling their future beauty. A tiny looking-glass with tin foil and shells glued on it passes from hand to hand. The girls are chattering.

"Sit over here in the sun, Sara-Khan, don't sit in the shade or it will all trickle away and be no use."

"Give me the glass, Galkhar. Of course, I'm going to be the prettiest. Tomorrow I'll do my plaits over again."

"I've heard that there are browless women with naked eyes, girls. Isn't that shameless of them, girls? I can't understand such women."

"D'you want a bit of bread, Nor Bibi? You're staring at it as though. . . ."

"Give me the glass, Adalat."

"Hand the glass to me, Sharifa."

This was how Nor Bibi looked, with blue cheeks and a piece of bread in her hands, when their rich neighbour, Mir Shahid, saw her. And since she was beautiful, the most beautiful of them all, and her father was a poor man, Mir Shahid bought her as a wife.

So, for the first time in her life Nor Bibi has her face covered with a *chachwan,* a thick veil with only a horsehair net to look through. For a minute she likes it, she feels she is grown up. But when she looks through the horsehair net at the apricot tree in full bloom (it is spring) she does not recognise it. The blossoms on the boughs are all grey, as though they are made of ashes and dust. Nor Bibi throws back the *chachwan* and for an instant the tree bursts out in rosy flames and the blue sky shines above it. The mother stork, as white as cotton, with a bright red beak, is sitting among the green foliage of her tree. But the *chachwan* is lowered at once and all the colours fade.

And now Nor Bibi is married. As her mother

prophesied she has two sewing machines, a hand machine and a treadle machine, and in addition to all this, she has a third machine, a singing machine, a gramophone. But what joy can they give her, when her husband is an old man and she does not love him? So, there it is, a woman's bad luck, as old as the world itself. As for Mir Shahid's first wife, she has already forgotten that she was ever twelve years old. She cannot forgive the young their youth. What is more, she has a wicked heart.

Mir Shahid is jealous. He once saw his young wife standing on tiptoes to look into the neighbouring courtyard and ordered his field hands to build the wall higher. And no matter how quickly Nor Bibi grows, the wall grows more quickly.

She has nimble legs and wants to run about. She runs about the yard after a donkey colt but the first wife shouts at her.

"I can see you want to kill your husband's future son, the strong boy you are soon to give birth to! Don't look at the gate or the boy will have thick lips. Don't go out in the rain or the boy will be pock-marked. Didn't they teach you anything, my beautiful beggar-maid?"

Mir Shahid hoped for a son but a daughter was born.

"I knew it, I knew!" wailed the first wife. "I told you so! You'll see, Mir Shahid, my love, she'll give you only daughters. There are such shameless hussies!"

Nor Bibi's daughter lies asleep in her cradle, and her mother sings to her when no one is about.

Sleep, my sweetness!
You will grow and be strong,
And then when you marry,
Let the man be poor but young,
O daughter mine.

You'll be the first in his heart,
You'll not be second or third,
And bear you him son or daughter,
He'll receive it as a gift,
O daughter mine.

Are the quince and the apple to blame
That they are not lovely peaches?
Tell me, O daughter mine,
Are you worse than a quince or an apple?

Time passes, and it sometimes happens that the same girls who sat together painting their eyebrows a few years before again gather in a courtyard. They have all long been married and some are beginning to look old. Their children are playing close by. The sun will soon be setting and the children's shadows grow longer with every minute. The women are sad; premature old age stretches its long shadow before them. They are chattering.

"Sit over here in the sun, Sara-Khan. You're so pale! You must be ill."

"D'you want to held my little boy, Nor Bibi? You're staring at him so. . . ."

"I've heard that there are women who go out into the street with their faces uncovered. I can't understand such women!"

"But I understand them," Nor Bibi said suddenly.

"Keep quiet, keep quiet, Nor Bibi, you've always been rebellious. You looked over the wall. You sometimes contradict your husband and you quarrel with the first wife. It's true, isn't it?"

Nor Bibi listens to her in silence. No, it isn't true. She is as obedient as the others. And just as helpless.

"Keep quiet, don't curse the *chachwan*," her neighbour repeats fearfully. "It covers your face and nobody knows what's written there. That's a

good thing for a woman. It's worse without the *chachwan.* Remember what happened to Gul Jamal."

"And what happened to Gul Jamal?" asked a woman from Jizakh, who did not know the local lore.

"Don't you know? All right, we'll tell you. Gul Jamal was our friend. One evening she went into the house from the courtyard. If she had known what was going to happen she wouldn't have gone in. But who does know? It was winter time, and cold outside, and there was a brazier burning in the room. There sat her husband's brother. Gul Jamal sat down beside the brazier to get warm and her face grew flushed with the heat. When her husband returned, she was as red as a cherry. And near to her sat the husband's brother. The husband looked at her and said, 'Come outside for a minute, I'll show you what I've bought.' So she went out into the courtyard and there he said to her, 'I'll show you how to carry on with my brother!' And with that he stabbed her four times in the side. And she fell and died."

The woman from Jizakh said nothing, nor did the other women speak. What was there to say?...

Time passed, 1917 came. In Russia there were exciting events but in the Mosque of Hoja Ahrar on the road to Aghalyq the colours were bright on the painted ceiling, and, as before, youngsters from rich families studied the Koran and the wonderful courtyard of the *madrasah* carried the words of the white-bearded mullah clearly to them all.

The Museum of Struggle Against the Counter-revolution, that material chronicle of the Civil War in the East, would be opened in Tashkent many years later. The Museum's collection was not yet made up, the exhibits were still scattered over the whole territory—those modern British rifles and the

ancient flint guns of the *basmachi*, the cartridge pouches, the sabres, the knuckledusters, home-made and from a factory in Liége, the saddles, the collapsible cups in leather cases, the amulets against the evil eye and against bullets, the daggers with turquoises in the hilts, the Kashgar knives, including the one used by a famous leader of the *basmachi* to cut up a woman, slowly, taking a whole hour, from the stomach to the throat—until he laid bare part of her throbbing heart. The woman's fellow-villagers begged the *kurbashi*, the bandit leader, to have mercy, to kill her outright. But the *kurbashi* would not let her die. He knew how to cut without killing immediately, he was an expert at the job. And as the knife moved slowly from the stomach towards the throat he spoke to her slowly.

"The woman who uncovers her face uncovers her heart. I am only continuing your work, my daughter."

"You're wrong, O wise one!" groaned her fellow-villagers, grovelling in the dust. "You're mistaken, O great one! It was not her. She has never forsaken the veil, we swear that!"

"If it was not her, it was another," answered the *kurbashi*. "It's all the same to me."

II

Time passes. Events, great and small, are occurring. Of the small events, one that is worthy of mention is the partial collapse of the wall around Mir Shahid's courtyard. The wall was washed away by the rain and Mir Shahid is afraid to have it repaired.

"They'll say Mir Shahid is rich," he told his first wife. "They'll say he must be very rich if he is in such a hurry to hide his property. I'm poor, I'm a beggar. What is one labourer, when once there were

three? What is one sewing machine, when once there were three, two that sewed and one that sang? I'm not rich, comrades, come and see for yourselves. I'm a beggar."

By now Nor Bibi is twenty-five and considers herself the middle-aged mother of three children. Three others died despite their baby caps having a bunch of owl's feathers on them to keep off the evil eye. Even that powerful charm did not help. The children all died one summer from dysentery and Nor Bibi never knew what they died of and what should have been done to save them.

Yes, events, large and small, are occurring. Nor Bibi looks out into the street through the gap in the wall and every time sees something new. She sees the first motor car and the first lorry that have come to replace the donkey and the camel. An aeroplane, a flying horse, comes flying over the mountains and lands in the foothills where, it is rumoured, a big stable called an aerodrome has been built for it.

Among the women on the Aghalyq road there are some with their faces uncovered. The noble youths from the *madrasah*, who have been nurtured in the shade, emerge blinking from the carved gates of Hoja Ahrar and depart for ever. The waxed pages of the books they hold pressed to their hearts are covered with Arabic writing. Young Uzbeks sit in tea-rooms reading newspapers. An out-patients' clinic is opened in a little white house next to the former mosque. Children go to school. Kindergartens appear.

Nor Bibi sees all this, but she continues to live as before.

"That's all very fine for the young," she thinks, "but I.... Where can I go? I have children. I have to feed them. I have no money."

And Nor Bibi goes on living as she lived before.

Although his wall has been damaged Mir Shahid is still very strong. He grovels and trembles at the very feet of Soviet power, but he remains alive. He has no labourer working for him, no donkey, his two wives are his sole remaining property.

"I am the most humble individual peasant," he says, pressing his hand to his heart. "Is it possible that I, a former spider and scorpion, should dare enter a collective farm, that gathering of the noble poor? Could I possibly dare look into the wise eyes of the chairman, my former labourer? No, do not ask me, please, do not beg me.

"I am not worthy of it. It even goes against my conscience to sell cocoons by contract. I wish it were not necessary for the despicable worms to work for our dear Soviet power. Let the nightingales and roses alone work for it, for they are as beautiful as Soviet power itself. But as for me—*rahmat*, thank you. How often I have seen Azim Jan, the scientist who breeds silkworms, in the *chaikhana* (tea-rooms). He was sent to our district from Samarkand to enlighten us, and I became great friends with him. I sat beside him and we drank green tea and talked about life. And it is such a pity that Comrade Urkabayev, the Deputy Secretary of the Samarkand City Committee, should shower reproaches on such a man. And should deprive him of his job.

"Comrade Urkabayev came to us in a little green car. He got out at the co-operative and crept up to the *chaikhana*. If I were not afraid that I might be insulting him, I would even say that he hid behind a tree as children do, when they play that innocent game 'I'm here, but where are you?' Azim Jan, as usual, was drinking green tea. Comrade Urkabayev stood quietly behind his tree watching our peasants, bent with care, come to the *chaikhana* for advice. Then he came out of hiding and shouted in a loud

voice, 'I'm here, but where are you? Is your place in the *chaikhana*?'

"It's a pity, a great pity that a worthy man should suffer, and in his place they've sent us—I'm ashamed to say it—a woman! She pokes her nose into the houses, peering into everything with her Russian eyes. So unpleasant!

"That same day Comrade Urkabayev visited many places in our unworthy village, and many more respected people suffered. Oh, oh, all this unpleasantness! And so Comrade Urkabayev comes to the kindergarten. There happy Soviet children play and run about. Not mine, oh no! I am unworthy. They run about and sing songs about flowers and are like flowers themselves. What more does anyone need? There's a girl living with them, a girl I've known for a long time. But Comrade Urkabayev ordered her to leave that place. And what for, dear people? Such misfortunes!"

Everything was exactly as Mir Shahid said.

But let us listen to Urkabayev as well.

One spring day he went with a friend and two visitors from Moscow to look at the ancient city of Samarkand with its magnificent ancient buildings.

Urkabayev and his friends went to the Registan. There they read an inscription in a niche in the western portal of the Shir-dar mosque—self-praise on the part of the builder of the mosque.

"He built a *madrasah* that was such that it brought the earth up to the zenith of the heavens. The might and zeal of the practised wings of that eagle called Mind will not reach the summit of the portal in years. That skilled acrobat, Thought, on the tight rope called Fantasy will not reach the pinnacle of its prohibited minarets in centuries. When the architect erected the arch of the portal with absolute precision, the heavens, mistaking it for a new moon, bit a finger in amazement."

"Complete absence of self-criticism," sighed Urkabayev.

When they had read the inscription they went up to a tower by a brickwork spiral staircase with such big steps that the muscles of their legs would ache for a long time afterwards. At last they emerged from the stony gloom on to a wide platform open to the winds. A polyphonic chorus of workmen's noise and knocking subdued by distance but nevertheless quite clear, floated up to the tower. There was the heavy hammering of the blacksmiths, the lighter blows of the tinsmiths, the faint tapping of the tinkers, the braying of the donkeys, the sound of camel bells, the twanging of a stringed instrument and monotonous singing—all these sounds that belonged to the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Suddenly somewhere to one side a new sound was born and grew rapidly, a sound of a completely different sort—a motor lorry was coming. And Urkabayev, a man of the Second Five-Year Plan, smiled with tenderness in his eyes.

His guests from Moscow were looking eagerly into the distance, where the spurs of the Tien Shan stood out like cut-glass against the sky. The flat yellow city stretched from the foot of the minaret all the way to the mountains, intersected in many places by flowering gardens. Now and again a high bluish wave burst out of that sea of clay. There were several of these waves—Gur Amir, Bibi-Khanum, Shah-Zindeh and, far away in the distance, the observatory of Ulug Bek, Tamerlane's famous grandson. And further away to the south there was the Hoja Ahrar.

"What silence, what peace!" exclaimed the admiring Muscovites.

Urkabayev's only answer was a deep sigh.

"A fine place! You don't know a thing. You look down and see nothing but a wonderful view, anti-

quities and so on. But underneath it is seething like a cauldron. Look over there.... That's the Hoja Ahrar Mosque with a village all round it.... I'll tell you a story." He seemed to brighten up, but it was a sad brightness. "Only don't lean on those bricks, they're not too strong.... Well, I went to visit that place. I'd been told, incidentally, that all the silkworm breeders had become deformed, they all leant over to one side. What strange disease is this, I wondered, and why do only silkworm breeders suffer from it?

"I walked towards the *chaikhana* and saw that the peasants were going there, too, and that they really were all crippled—everyone held his left elbow in his right hand and limped as he walked. Boils under their arms, or what, I wondered. That would be a fine thing! And what d'you think it was? They had an *incubist,* as they call the instructor sent to teach them to hatch the silkworm eggs in an incubator, a certain Azim Jan, a suspicious character. He was sent because there was no one else. The Uzbek Silk Trust, of course, supplied him with thermometers to hang in the hatcheries. You may not know that everything here depends on temperature—the worms can't stand the cold. If it drops below twenty-three degrees Centigrade, they grow inert and stop feeding. We've been doing everything we can to improve silkworm breeding, and this *incubist* was supposed to visit all the breeding rooms twice a day and check up—that's obvious. But instead of making the rounds himself, he ordered the peasants to come to him in the *chaikhana* and bring the thermometers under their arms so that the temperature came to him instead of him going to the temperature. That Azim Jan looked at the thermometers and sees the temperature is thirty-seven or so—the normal temperature of the body. 'Too much,' he says. 'Too hot, make a draught.' And of course the silkworms died."

The others all laughed.

"It's not funny," Urkabayev said thoughtfully. "It's very, very sad. Listen to the rest. On the way I called in at the district kindergarten. There I was met by the principal, such a sugary-mannered girl, a Russian. 'We have everything,' she said, 'it's wonderful and we're so happy. Come on, children, stand in line....' Well, the children came out.... Thin little things they were, you could nearly see through them. And they stood there and sang in Uzbek, in soft, weak voices:

We're the flowering lilies of a wondrous field,
We feed on sun and air...."

As he recalled that song Urkabayev swung round so savagely on the minaret that he raised a cloud of brick-dust with his elbow.

"That was all true, you know, they weren't lying. They really did feed on sun and air because their food rations were being systematically stolen. I checked up myself. You can't imagine how much harm a woman like that can do! I don't mean to the children alone, we fed them up, of course, but the grown-ups don't forget such things in a hurry. Kindergartens and nurseries are the best propaganda for Soviet power among the women! The women here have garlands of children round their necks...."

"That was well said," remarked one of the Muscovites. "You're a poet!"

Urkabayev sighed.

The new incubator instructor, the girl with the "Russian eyes", was Shura Potapova. She was the daughter of a farming specialist from the Volga-side, where the people know all about mushrooms and wild berries but have never even heard of silk-worms.

Potapov's wife was consumptive and had begun to look like the wax apple that lay on the woollen cloth that covered the little corner table in the dining-room. When Potapov looked at the flushed yellow cheeks of his wife, he could only blink and cough in polite doubt, when the doctor said the process was taking its normal course.

And then one wet spring day the doctor looked doubtful too.

"She should go to the south, to the Crimea or the Caucasus."

"What would we eat?" Potapov asked him brutally.

Neither had an answer to that. Shura was a year old at the time and was crawling on the floor on a newspaper that said that the ferryman's house on the River Marne had at last fallen to the Allies after prolonged fighting.

"If Turkestan were any good," said Potapov, "I could manage that, I think. A friend wrote and told me they need farming specialists in Tashkent."

"Why, that's wonderful!" The doctor was pleased with the idea. "That's in the south, sunshine—just what's needed. You absolutely must go! In three or four months you won't know your wife!"

This turned out to be quite true. Six months later, standing beside his wife's coffin, Potapov could scarcely recognise her, so cruelly had the subtropical sun and loess dust eaten away her flesh.

The poplar-tree planted on Liza's grave grew at such an unheard-of rate that it seemed to be trying to catch up with the famous Tashkent poplars that General Kaufmann had planted when he conquered the region. At first it was only that one poplar-tree that kept Potapov in Tashkent. Then he came to like the region and did not recall his dead wife so often. On one occasion, however, after he had spent

some time in the mountain sanatorium at Chimghan, he talked to Shura about her.

"The doctor was right. The climate up there in the hills is wonderful. But before the revolution we would never have been allowed anywhere near there, and by then Mother was no longer with us."

Every spring Potapov measured his daughter's height. By the time her fair head had reached her father's shoulder she had become a silkworm breeding instructor. Potapov himself was working at the Silk Institute on the hybridisation of cocoons.

When it was proposed to send Shura urgently to Samarkand Potapov grew depressed.

She was all he had. They had never yet lived apart. They went together to the mulberry nursery at the Silk Institute. It was early spring and all the varieties of mulberry tree—ordinary, dwarf, shrubs, pyramidal, spherical and serpentine—all of them stood with swollen buds. The big-leafed variety, a beauty that had been brought from Japan, stood out among them.

Father and daughter began walking up and down the path but did not go as far as the little white house where the experimental silkworms were kept in isolation; these had been infected with the disease known as pebrine, and were looked after by a special staff.

"Do you remember when I had diphtheria, Dad, and was kept away from everyone?" Shura laughed.

Potapov nodded pensively.

"You're sorry I'm going, aren't you?" she asked. "But I have to go. What sort of Komsomol member would I be, if I didn't? Anyway, I want to go, it'll be my first independent job and there are two hundred and forty-five trays of graine to be brought back to life."

"I realise that you must go and want to go. But why must you be off to another district straight away? Don't you think it would be better to start here?"

"And don't you think it's the opportunist in you that's talking?"

Potapov looked keenly at his daughter.

"It probably is."

"Excellent. Since you admit it you must be repenting."

"I am. Only write to me as often as you can, Shura. Please. And write about everything. Promise?"

Shura looked hard at her father for a moment.

"I promise."

III

When it became known in Samarkand that there would be a commission set up in each *mahalla*, or quarter, of the city to decide who was worthy to receive an identification card there were many people who did not like the idea; one of them was Mir Shahid.

"I'm afraid, friends," he said, "that the little book on which, I've been told, the word 'passport' is printed in six languages, is going to give us cause to sigh six times for the good old days when we didn't have it. Take me, for instance. Why write about me on paper when it has long been written in my heart that I am an honest and kind-hearted Uzbek? It's true I was once rich, but that was in the past. And since it has passed, why think about what is no more? But that's not all. Suppose our wives want to have a separate passport? What will happen then? Will a wife want to obey her husband if our solicitous Soviet government hands her a book with her name, age and special marks of identifica-

tion all put down in it—just as if she were a sheep so that everyone will know the state of her udder and which of her legs is lame?"

As he argued in this way, Mir Shahid was thinking of his second wife, Nor Bibi. Recently there had been a gleam in her eyes that gave him food for thought. A few days passed and Mir Shahid again addressed the company that was well disposed towards him.

"Yes, my friends! I discovered by chance that my wife, Nor Bibi, had gone to the *mahalla* committee and asked about a passport. Of course, I was upset at her taking such a decision without consulting me. When she came home I talked to her a little and I hope she has now changed her mind. I don't think she needs a passport. If she—may her days be prolonged—were to die, Allah would know her without a passport because she now has all her special marks of identification with her. For I, like an industrious scribe, have written everything that needs to be written on her own skin and it will be quite impossible to mistake her for another woman, my friends."

It was about this time that Potapov received his first long letter from Shura.

Dear Daddy,

That Azim Jan, the man who was sacked before I came, was an outright saboteur. He froze almost all the worms to death because he ordered them not to heat the premises in spring when, as you know, it is cold, and even had the windows opened. The worst of it is that now, even when the windows ought to be opened, nobody will want to—they won't believe me. That's what always happens—a bad worker not only does harm himself but gets in the way of others. I've been told what the people here have been saying—when there were no incu-

bators, they say, the silkworms bred wonderfully. You must realise what that means and the responsibility it puts upon me! And you didn't want me to come here!

Now I want to tell you where I'm living—in a mosque! That's something I'd never dreamed of. The former students' cells have been adapted to take incubators and I'm living in one of the cells. There is a smoke-blackened place where the fire used to be and a shelf for books. I sleep in the little niche a local student once slept in. My breeding centre gives service to collective farmers and also to individual peasants. I give eggs to some of them, but, of course, I prefer giving out hatched worms. The trouble is that they usually all come for the worms at the same time, after work. They all stand in line with their little baskets and my assistants and I are run off our feet. I have three girls to help me—two sent by the collective farm and one from the village Soviet. I manage to speak to them in quite decent Uzbek.

The mulberry trees are not far away, but they are not the shrub kind, they are very tall trees that are difficult to climb. The local kids gather leaves for me. Everyone who brings me a good armful gets an empty box that has contained silkworm eggs. And they try very hard.

There's one bad thing—almost all the trees grow along the road and they are covered with dust. The leaves are useless in that state and I'm afraid that if I wash them and give them to the worms wet I may give them diarrhoea. Please write and tell me what to do.

I'm worried about ventilation. There are no windows here, only doors leading to the inner courtyard, and that, incidentally, is so wonderfully designed that if you whisper a word at one end it can be heard at the other.

By the way, in one of the cells I found a whole packet of posters issued by the Uzbek Silk Trust—you know, the yellow and green ones, with a huge silkworm in the middle and all round it instructions in Uzbek. I discovered that Azim Jan had never given those posters to anyone but had simply stuffed them away in a corner.

The district instructor has been to see me, but I would rather ask you what to do. You may not belong to the Party, but you are an old specialist and, what is more, you are my father.

Well, Daddy, good-bye. I have a sleepless night ahead of me. The worms will probably be hatched out by sunrise—the "single spies" have already appeared. Oh yes—and have you noticed that the newly-hatched worms, when they crawl through the netting, push and shove like people in a tram, and that a whole crowd of them will try to get through the same hole? That, of course, is by the way.

All the best,

Yours,

Shura

Second letter.

Dear Daddy,

It is so long since I last wrote to you—I've been terribly busy but now things are easier. The main batch of silkworms has already been distributed. I got a healthy lot, very few spotted ones. Yesterday I began my tour of the places that had been provided with worms. I went with one of my assistants from the collective farm, Muhabbat is her name. She is an excellent woman, a Party member! She is not young, she even has grandchildren, but she's never down-hearted. When she tells me about her past she laughs, although she has had a pretty hard life. Take her married life, for instance. She was born into a poor family, the seventh child. She was

sixteen years old, an "old maid", when she married, because no one would have her on account of her poverty. At last they found her a husband, quite a well-to-do fellow apparently, who had carpets, and quilts, and clothes, and even a samovar. Muhabbat married him and for three days enjoyed the wealth, especially the samovar. Then it turned out that none of it was his own, he had borrowed them all. First came one of her husband's friends and took away the carpets, a second took the quilts and a third something else. Nothing was left but the samovar. Then they came for that.

"And I sat down beside the samovar," said Muhabbat, "and hugged it, and pressed my cheek to it. It was cold, and I was hot. I cried but it remained silent. Still, they took it away. It all seems so funny to me now. I was a silly girl, poor and ignorant! I laughed and cried and never knew why."

That is what she told me.

Well, we went together and came to the house of one of the farmers. We knocked at the door but got no answer. Bright sunshine. Silence. And what silence. Only the poppies nodding on the earthen roof and the bees humming in the air. At last the door was opened and we went in. A centenarian met us, all brown; she was wearing a tattered veil and looked more dead than alive. Another old woman came from the neighbours' yard, and then a third. Then came an old man of about the same age. And, finally, a lot of kids came running into the courtyard. And so we had a plenary meeting!

"Where are the others? Working?" Muhabbat asked.

"Working," they said. "In the orchards and vegetable gardens." (Our collective farm grows fruit and vegetables.)

Suddenly one of the girls, who looked older than the others, spoke in Russian.

"Our people are in the vineyard. They've brought nitrogen there, for fertiliser."

And all those ancient men and women nodded their heads, and smiled and repeated, "Azot", "Azot" (*nitrogen*), *the only Russian word they had understood. When we left I shouted back to them:*

"Khair, *Good-bye!* Azot!"

And they answered me, "Azot!"

Before that, however, we looked at the silkworms. They were kept in a tightly closed room, in a basket hanging from the ceiling and covered with a wadded quilt. They were cold and stifled. I took the quilt off them and opened the window. And this is what Muhabbat told me.

"You have no idea what silk means to our women. This is where their independence begins. The 'silk money' is the woman's money. Only you have to make sure the women bring in the cocoons themselves, so that they do get the money. It can happen that they do all the work and the money goes to the men."

Good-bye, Daddy.

Yours,
Shura

Third letter.

Daddy, listen, if you only knew!... This is what happened here. Muhabbat and I went round again.

"We ought to go in here," she said as we were passing one house. "There's a bad man lives here, Mir Shahid. His second wife is still very unhappy. The new life has come to this street but it does not enter her courtyard. She has three children; the third is still a baby and is very ill. Where can she go with it? If she leaves the baby at home the first wife will put an end to it in no time."

We went in. A fine, big room, the walls papered with financial inspector's report sheets. Plenty of

everything—drinking bowls, trays, glass jars and a whole pile of quilts. The man of the house was all honey, bowing to us and fawning. He had a sash bound round his loins, which meant that he still hoped to find favour with the ladies. And the cap, worn on the back of his head, was a sign of self-satisfaction. The children were there, too. The smallest of them was bow-legged.

"You should take her to a doctor. She has rickets," I said.

He simply placed his hand on his heart and thanked me, punning on the Russian word "rakhit" *(rickets) and the Uzbek word* "rakhmat" (*thanks*). *He was obviously trying to make fun of me. A woman was standing by his side.*

"Can that be Nor Bibi?" I whispered to Muhabbat.

"That's not her. That's the first wife. Wait a moment, I'll ask where she is."

She did not have time to ask, however.

This is what happened then.

I went to look at the silkworms; they hatch out their own eggs and the worms there had just been hatched. That woman, the first wife, was gathering them up in a sheet of ordinary paper.

"You mustn't do that, apa *(sister), you'll crush them. You must do it with a chicken's feather. I'll bring you one, quickly."*

I ran out into the courtyard, thinking that they must have some chickens. I saw a magpie feather lying on the ground near a tree stump. That will do, I thought, and bent down to pick it up, and then I heard a groan from under the stump. I went nearer and saw that the stump was leaning against the door of a low building. I don't know why, but it suddenly occurred to me that Nor Bibi was ill and that they had hidden her there. I had no time to think about it (it all happened so quickly, in less

than a minute), for Mir Shahid had followed me into the courtyard.

"How kind you are, instructor-apa, *to take so much trouble over our despicable silkworms!" he said in the sweetest tones. "But we haven't had any chickens for a long time."*

"Never mind, Mir Shahid-aka *(brother)," I answered in tones just as sweet, "a despicable magpie feather will do just as well."*

I gave no sign that I had heard anything....

Daddy, I can't go on with this now, I think I can hear wasps flying about. That worries me even more than spiders or mice, although they, too, are fond of silkworms. The wasps are the worst of all. I'll go and see what they are making so much noise about. Then I'll come back and write the rest. What we found after that!...

What they discovered was the following.

Kurkmas Nizamov, secretary of the Komsomol organisation of the collective farm, was ploughing between the rows of grape-vines with a tractor plough, so as to plant clover and peas between the vines. This was, at that time, a new method of using the land between the rows of grape-vines. It was a method that had many opponents, who asserted that anything planted between the rows would exhaust the earth and leave no juices for the grapes; on account of this it had been decided to try it in one place only.

Kurkmas drove his tractor very carefully. He knew that his Fordson was too wide for the job and might damage the vines. What he needed was the narrower International, but there was no "Inter" available, and he was worried. His cap was wet with perspiration and the tulip behind his ear had quickly faded in the heat of his burning cheek.

Shura came running after the tractor in a cloud of dust.

"Kurkmas, stop!" she shouted.

Kurkmas, however, continued to the end of the furrow and only then turned to speak to her.

"What's the matter? I can see a dust cloud screaming at me but I don't know who's in the cloud. What do you want? Here every minute counts, and you stand there screaming."

"Wait a bit, I have a minute that counts more!"

Hanging on to the wheel of the tractor as though she wanted to hold it back, and burning her hands on the sun-heated metal, Shura told Kurkmas the whole story.

Mir Shahid had told the truth. It would have been impossible to mistake Nor Bibi for any other woman. Her "marks of identification" were caked with blood. The deepest wound was one that went upwards from her eyes into her tangled hair.

Nor Bibi was sitting in a tiny shed on a torn blanket, her arms round her knees, staring at the ground.

"She has fever, comrades," the trembling Mir Shahid declared. "She has the sort of fever that makes you shiver, lose consciousness and bang your head until the blood comes.... Nor Bibi, my dear wife, you have fever, haven't you?"

Nor Bibi did not speak. Nor did Kurkmas, Shura, Muhabbat and the district militiaman speak until, at last, the woman doctor from the clinic broke the silence.

"It's a good thing we brought the stretcher along. Only be careful with her, comrades."

When Nor Bibi had been carried away, Urunbai, the district militiaman (also with a tulip behind his ear for spring in Central Asia is tulip time), turned to Mir Shahid.

"Your wife will live, that doctor will cure her,

and that is good. The only pity is that thanks to her, you will stay alive, too. Get a move on, though, don't keep them waiting in the place that has been expecting you for years."

IV

The old *madrasah* at the Hoja Ahrar Mosque, the school that had brought up so many noble youths, was filled with women. The meeting was a spontaneous one, nobody had foreseen it and nobody had made any special preparations for it. It just happened that at a certain moment it had become widely known that Nor Bibi had completely recovered and been discharged from hospital and was sitting under the apricot tree drinking tea with the instructor from Tashkent, to whom she had gone straight from hospital. When it became known, all the women in the village, collective-farm women and wives of individual peasants, all who had no work on hand at the time, made their way to the mosque. Soon the whole courtyard was full. Shura, taken by surprise, had time only to hang up those of Azim Jan's posters that she had not yet distributed. The square stone courtyard was bright with green and yellow. The greatly magnified silkworms crawled along the walls between the carved wooden doors. The most important poster (and the only one of its kind left) was the one with the picture of a young Uzbek woman in orange, who somewhat resembled Nor Bibi but was wearing a Communist Youth International badge; this poster was hung at the entrance to the courtyard by way of a welcome.

Muhabbat opened the meeting by clapping her hands three times. The courtyard with its wonderful acoustics repeated the sounds. There was a rustle of women's clothing and a slight movement of their shawls and scarves. Then there was silence.

It was spring, and the hour of sunset. Above the *madrasah* of Hoja Ahrar hung a blue square of sky, ornamented, as was proper and fitting at the time, with a clear crescent moon.

Nor Bibi sat on a bench under the apricot tree in the middle of the courtyard.

"Sisters!" Muhabbat exclaimed. "Here you see in front of you Nor Bibi, a woman we all know. Let us consider what sort of life this woman has had."

Again the rustle of clothing, followed by silence.

"In the past our women had five masters. Isn't that too many? That's how it was. The first master was God. The second was the Emir, the third the one who gave her work, the one who owned the land and the water and distributed them as he saw fit, the fourth was the mullah, and the fifth was the woman's husband. Sisters, we are bringing Nor Bibi to trial for having got rid of four of her masters and retained the fifth. Before the revolution we were sold for money or rice or were exchanged for goods of any kind. As children we were given in marriage to old men (what are you crying for, Nor Bibi?), to old men who had other wives besides us. They robbed us of our childhood and we kept quiet. Nor Bibi, you are guilty of having kept silent so long! Is she guilty, sisters?" asked Muhabbat.

"Guilty!" answered the sisters, their eyes filling with tears.

"Stand up, Nor Bibi, and look us in the eyes. You are guilty of not having believed in your own strength. You were afraid to leave your husband, afraid that Soviet power would abandon you at the crossroads, afraid that the government is too big and too far away to see your little troubles. But Soviet power has seen them. For Soviet power is me, is all of us; it is you yourself. You're young,

Nor Bibi, remember that. You're healthy, you can work."

"There's very little I can do, Muhabbat," answered Nor Bibi in a soft voice, but the amazing courtyard repeated her words so clearly that everyone heard them.

"Not much you can do?" Muhabbat let her eyes wander over the whole courtyard, as though seeking an answer....

And here is what Shura wrote later to her father.

Nor Bibi spoke very softly, but everyone heard her.

"There's not much I can do," she said.

Beautiful and clever Muhabbat—that woman is worth her weight in gold—glanced all round the courtyard, as though seeking an answer. And the answer was there on all sides, Azim Jan's posters simply jumped at her. Especially the Uzbek girl with the cocoons. And Muhabbat pointed her stumpy brown finger at that poster.

"You can do that, can't you? All roads are open to you—that's what you've forgotten."

It's a pity, a great pity you couldn't hear how they judged Nor Bibi and sentenced her to freedom and happiness.

Translated by George H. Hanna

VALENTIN KATAYEV

Almost all the novels and stories by Valentin Katayev (b. 1897) are about the revolution and the Civil War. One of his most famous novels, *A White Sail Gleams*, has been translated into many languages and has also been filmed.

Katayev was born in Odessa, in the south of the Ukraine, and witnessed the stormy events of the revolution in that part of the country. In the early twenties, towards the end of the Civil War, Budyonny's First Cavalry Army fought its way across the Ukraine; many stories and songs have been written about that famous army, and many legends have grown up around it. Katayev's short story *Sleep* is written around an episode in the life of that army.

SLEEP

Sleep takes up one-third of a man's life, but scientists still cannot tell us exactly what sleep is. An old encyclopaedia says, "As regards the immediate cause of the onset of this condition, only assumptions exist".

I was about to close that weighty volume since I could find nothing precise about sleep in it, when I saw in the neighbouring column a couple of delightful lines about sleep.

"In art, sleep is depicted allegorically as a human figure with the wings of a butterfly on its shoulders and a poppy in its hand."

This naive but lovely metaphor fired my imagination.

I want to relate an amazing case of sleep that deserves to go down in history.

On July 30, 1919, Red Army units had left Tsaritsyn in disorder and had begun a retreat to the north. The retreat lasted forty-five days. The only efficient fighting force left was the Cavalry Corps of 5,500 men commanded by Semyon Mikhailovich Budyonny. Compared with the forces at the disposal of the enemy, this Corps seemed insignificant.

Budyonny, however, was ordered to cover the retreat and his Corps had to bear the brunt of all enemy attacks.

It was really one long battle lasting many days and nights. In the short pauses in the fighting there was no time to eat properly, sleep, wash, or unsaddle the horses.

It was an unusually hot summer. The fighting took place on a relatively narrow stretch of land between the Volga and the Don, but despite that, the troops were often without water for twenty-four hours on

end. The situation was such that they could not afford even half an hour to ride a few versts to the wells.

Water was more valuable than bread. And time was more valuable than water.

In the first three days and nights of the retreat they had to beat off twenty attacks.

Twenty!

The men lost their voices. They hacked with their sabres but were unable to force a sound out of their dry throats.

It was a terrible scene—a cavalry charge, contact with the enemy, slashing sabres, distorted faces covered with dirty sweat and not a single human sound....

Soon the torment of combating sleep was added to the torment of thirst, hunger and excessive heat.

A dispatch rider, who had galloped through the dust with a message, fell from his saddle and dropped off to sleep at the feet of his horse.

When an attack was over, the men could scarcely keep their seats in their saddles. Sleep was irresistible.

Evening came and their eyes were heavy with it. Their eyelids closed like magnets and would not open. The blood in their hearts grew as heavy and immobile as mercury. Pulses slowed, arms stiffened and then suddenly dropped heavily; fingers lost their grip, heads nodded and caps slipped forward on to foreheads.

The blue haze of the summer night slowly enveloped five and a half thousand cavalrymen swaying in their saddles like pendulums.

The commanders of the regiments rode up to Budyonny, expecting an order.

"Everyone is to sleep," said Budyonny, laying special stress on the word "everyone". "I order rest for everyone."

"But, Comrade General.... How.... What about pickets and sentries?..."

"Everyone, everyone...."

"Who will...."

"I will," said Budyonny, turning up his left sleeve and peering at his wristwatch.

He glanced at the face of the watch. The smoky phosphorus of the figures and hands gleamed out of the twilight.

"Everyone is to sleep without exception, the whole Corps," he said, raising his voice cheerfully. "You have exactly two hundred and forty minutes rest."

He did not say four hours. Four hours would be too little. He said two hundred and forty minutes. He allowed the maximum that could be allowed in the circumstances.

"Do not worry about anything else," he added. "I'll stand watch over the troops. Personally. On my own responsibility. Two hundred and forty minutes, and not a second more. The signal for reveille will be a shot from my pistol."

He slapped the holster of his Mauser pistol and gave his roan horse Kazbek a light touch with the spur.

One man stood guard over the sleep of the entire Corps, and that one man was the Corps commander. This was a monstrous contravention of army rules and regulations, but there was no other way. One for all and all for one—such was the unbreakable law of the revolution.

Five thousand five hundred soldiers dropped like one man on to the rich grass of the gully. Some found strength enough to unsaddle and hobble their horses, after which they fell asleep with their heads on their saddles. The others collapsed at the feet of their saddled horses and, still holding the halter,

dropped off into a sleep that was more like sudden death.

The gully, dotted with sleeping men, looked like the scene of a battle in which everyone had been killed.

Budyonny rode slowly round the bivouac followed by his batman, the seventeen-year-old Grisha Kovalyov. That swarthy lad could barely keep his seat in the saddle; his head was nodding and he was making frantic efforts to hold it up, but it was as heavy as lead.

And so they rode round the bivouac, circle after circle, the Corps commander and his batman, two men awake amidst five thousand five hundred asleep.

At that time Semyon Budyonny was much younger. His peasant face with its high cheek-bones, long, thick, jet-black moustache and black brows was tanned almost orange by the sun.

As he rode round the bivouac he now and again recognised some of the men in the light of the rising moon and, when he recognised them, he smiled with the tender smile of a father leaning over the cradle of his sleeping son.

There was Grisha Waldmann, a ginger-whiskered giant, who lay, as he had fallen, on his back in the grass, his head resting on his saddle, his Mauser pistol grasped in a fist like a leg of mutton, the fingers of which could not be unclenched even when he was asleep. His chest was broad and capacious as a packing crate. And now it was tilted towards the stars. It rose and fell rhythmically, in time with the terrific snoring that set the grass waving all round him. The other huge hand lay spread on the warm earth—just try and take that land away from Grisha Waldmann!

And there was Ivan Belenky, a Don Cossack with a forelock over his eyes, sleeping like the dead; instead of the sharp Cossack sabre at his side he wore a huge, old sword that he had requisitioned from the house of a landowner who was a lover of ancient weapons. For hundreds of years that sword had hung against a Persian carpet on the wall of a nobleman's study. Now it had been taken by Ivan Belenky, a Don Cossack who had sharpened it properly and was using it in battles against the Whites. No one else in the whole Corps had such long and strong arms as Ivan Belenky. This is what once happened. Ivan went to a rich farmstead for forage for his horse. He asked them to sell him some hay.

"We haven't got any, there's only one small haycock left," the woman there told him.

"I don't want much," Ivan said plaintively, "only enough for my horse, just an armful."

"All right, you can take an armful, I suppose," said the woman, "go and take it."

"Thanks, missus."

And Ivan Belenky, a Don Cossack, went up to the haycock and took it all up at once in his long arms. The woman gasped—never before had she seen such long arms. There was nothing she could do, however, and Ivan merely grunted and carried the haycock away towards the camp. He arrived at the camp, however, more dead than alive, and without any hay. His hands were trembling, his teeth were chattering, and he was panting so hard he could scarcely speak.

"What's wrong, Ivan?"

"Oh . . . don't ask me. I got so scared. . . . Damn the fellow. . . ."

The soldiers were astounded—what could it have

been that the most fearless of them, Ivan Belenky, had been frightened by?

He just stood there unable to gather his wits.

"To hell with him!... A blasted deserter scared me, may he burn in hell!"

"What are you talking about? What happened?"

"I'm telling you ... a deserter.... I took that damned hay, may it burn, and started carrying it... and then something began wriggling in the middle of it—may his soul go to hell, the damned deserter!"

It seemed that a deserter had hidden in the haycock, and Ivan had carried him away together with the hay. On the way the deserter had started wriggling in the hay like a mouse, then he had jumped out and scared the fearless warrior Belenky almost to death.

How they all laughed!

And again Budyonny smiled, a tender manly smile, as he rode carefully past the head of his soldier Ivan Belenky, past his sharp sword that reflected the blue full moon like a mirror.

The night was passing. The starry clock of the steppeland night was moving overhead. Soon it would be time to rouse the men.

Suddenly Kazbek stood still and pricked up his ears. Budyonny listened keenly. Then he straightened his khaki cap, which had been scorched on the side by camp-fires.

Several horsemen were making their way along the top of the gully. One after another their shadows covered the moon. Budyonny kept very still. The horsemen rode down to the bivouac. The one in the lead reined in his horse and bent down to a soldier who had not slept quite the allotted time and was changing his footcloths in front of a dimly glowing fire. The horseman held a cigarette in his fingers and wanted a light.

"Hi," said the horseman, "what village are you from? Give me a light."

"And who may you be?"

"Can't you see?"

The horseman lowered his shoulder for the soldier to look. On his shoulder-strap the insignia of a colonel gleamed in the moonlight. An officers' patrol had blundered into the Red Army bivouac and mistaken it for their own. The Whites must be very close. There was no time to lose. Budyonny rode cautiously out of the shadow and raised his Mauser. A shot rang out in the silence. The colonel fell. Budyonny's men jumped to their feet. The officers' patrol was taken prisoner.

"Mount!" shouted Budyonny.

In a minute five thousand five hundred men were in their saddles. And in another minute, in the first rays of the dewy steppeland sun they saw the dust cloud raised by the approaching White cavalry. Budyonny ordered his Corps to turn about. Three horse artillery batteries opened fire. The battle had begun.

. . .Budyonny told me that story himself.

"Five and a half thousand men slept like one, where they fell," he said, smiling pensively. "And you should have heard the snores! They even set the grass waving, those snores did!"

He squinted at the map hanging on the wall, and then with special pleasure repeated, "Set the grass waving, they did!"

I was sitting with him at the time in his office at the Military Revolutionary Council. Outside one of those businesslike Moscow snow showers was covering the city.

But I could picture that wonderful scene. Steppe. Night. A moon. A sleeping bivouac. Budyonny on

his Kazbek. And behind him, grappling with irresistible sleep, trots a swarthy boy with a bunch of faded poppies behind his ear and a butterfly asleep on his hot, dusty shoulder.

Translated by George H. Hanna

BORIS LAVRENYOV

Boris Lavrenyov's name is closely bound up with the early days of Soviet literature and the Soviet theatre. He put it this way—"my literary birth took place after the revolution". His play *The Break-Up* was first produced in 1927 and today is still in the repertoire of the Moscow Art Theatre and many other Soviet theatres. Lavrenyov (1891-1959) is a dramatic writer; this is especially true of his stories, long and short, which are filled with the heroic romanticism of the revolutionary epoch. *The Forty First* is one of his best-known tales.

In memory of Pavel Dmitriyevich Zhukov

THE FORTY FIRST

CHAPTER 1

Which was written only because it had to be written

For a brief moment the glittering encirclement of Cossack sabres was cut through on the north by a jet of machine-gun fire, and in a last wild effort the crimson Yevsukov plunged through the breach.

Those who escaped from the death-ring in the sands of the hollow were: the crimson Yevsukov, twenty-three of his men, and Maryutka.

A hundred and nineteen others and almost all the camels lay motionless on the frozen sands, among the snake-like roots of saksaul and the red twigs of tamarisk.

When Cossack officer Buryga was informed that the remnants of the enemy had escaped, he twisted his bushy moustache with a bear-like paw, stretched his mouth in a yawn like the opening of a cave, and drawled lazily:

"To hell with them! Don't bother chasing them; it'll only wear out the horses. The desert'll get them."

Meanwhile, the crimson Yevsukov, with Maryutka and the twenty-three, were plunging erratically, like wounded jackals, deeper and deeper into an illimitable waste of sand.

No doubt the reader is impatient to know why Yevsukov was crimson.

I shall explain.

When Kolchak corked up the Orenburg railway line with a mass of bristling bayonets and human

pulp, setting the dumbfounded locomotives on their rear ends to rust on out-of-the-way sidings, the Turkestan Republic was left without black dye for its leather.

And those were roaring, raging, leather days.

The human body, thrown out of the domestic comfort of four walls into rain and shine, heat and cold, had need of a strong protective covering.

And so it donned leather.

Ordinarily the jackets were dyed black with a steel-blue tinge, a colour as stern and hard as the men who wore them.

But Turkestan was left without this black dye.

And so Revolutionary Staff Headquarters had to issue an order requisitioning private stocks of the German aniline dyes with which Uzbek women from the Ferghana Valley gave the tints of the fire-bird to their gauzy silks, and thin-lipped Turkmenian women wove brilliance into the complicated patterns of their Tekke carpets.

The Red Army began dyeing skins with these aniline dyes, and in no time its ranks were scintillating with all the shades of the rainbow: emerald, sapphire, crimson, cobalt, purple, saffron.

Fate, in the person of a pock-marked supply man, meted out to Commissar Yevsukov a crimson jacket and breeches.

From early youth Yevsukov's face had had a crimson cast (sprinkled over with brown freckles) and the top of his head was covered with a light fuzz instead of hair. If to this we add that he was short in stature and voluminous in circumference and that his figure made a perfect oval, it can instantly be seen that in his crimson jacket and breeches he looked for all the world like an animated Easter egg. The straps of his trappings crossed on his back to form the letter X, and one would

expect that on turning round he ought to exhibit the letter B on his front to complete the saying.*

Nothing of the sort. Yevsukov did not believe in Christ or in Easter. He believed in the Soviets, the International, the Cheka, and the heavy revolver he clutched in strong, gnarled fingers.

The twenty-three who escaped with him out of the death-ring of sabres were the usual run of Red Army men. Just ordinary men.

With them, and one of them, was the girl Maryutka.

Maryutka was an orphan from a fishing village hidden among the reeds of the vast Volga delta near Astrakhan. For twelve years, beginning at the age of seven, she had sat astride a bench stained with fish entrails, ripping open the slippery grey bellies of herring.

When to all towns and villages came news of the enlistment of volunteers into what was then called the Red Guards, Maryutka stuck her knife into the bench, got up, and marched off in her stiff canvas trousers to sign up.

At first they drove her away, and then, seeing the obstinacy that brought her back day after day, they guffawed and accepted her in the ranks on the same terms as the men.

Maryutka was slender as a reed growing on the river bank, with auburn plaits that she wound round her head under her brown Turkmenian cap, and with a yellowish, cat-like glint in her almond-shaped eyes.

The main thing in Maryutka's life was her dreams. She was given to day-dreaming, and she was also given to writing "poetry", tracing totter-

* X and B are the first letters of the Russian words "Христос Воскресе" meaning "Christ is risen". Easter eggs were usually marked with these initials.—*Tr.*

ing letters with a stub of pencil on any scrap of paper that came to hand.

The entire detachment knew this. The minute they entered a town that had its own newspaper, Maryutka would ask for writing paper. On receiving it, she would lick her lips, which had suddenly gone dry with excitement, and painstakingly copy out her "poetry", giving each poem a title, and writing at the bottom: "By Maria Basova."

There were poems of revolution, of struggle, poems about the leaders. There was even one about Lenin.

And she would take them to the editorial office. The editors, astounded by the sight of this slip of a girl in a leather jacket and with a rifle over her shoulder, would take the verses and promise to read them. And Maryutka, after casting a serene look at each of them in turn, would go out.

The secretary of the editorial board would snatch them up eagerly and begin to read. Soon his shoulders would hump up and begin to shake, his mouth distort with irrepressible laughter. His colleagues would gather round, and between shrieks of laughter he would read the verses out loud while his listeners writhed on their window-sills (there was no furniture in the offices of those days).

The next morning Maryutka would come back, gaze with steady eyes at the secretary's twitching face, then pick up her poems and say in a singsong voice:

"No good, eh? No finish? I knew it. I chop them out of my heart like with an axe, but—they're no good. I s'pose I've got to work harder. Can't be helped. What the hell makes it so hard, d'ye think? A fish-pox on them!"

And out she would go with a shrug of her shoul-

ders, pulling her Turkmenian cap down over her eyes.

Maryutka was not much of a poet, but she was an expert sharp-shooter. She was the best shot in the detachment, and in battle she was always to be found at Yevsukov's side.

He would point a finger.

"Look, Maryutka! An officer!"

She would screw up her eyes, lick her lips, and leisurely level her gun. Bang!—and she had her man. Never a miss.

After each shot she would say as she lowered her gun:

"The thirty-ninth, a fish-pox on him!..." "The fortieth, a fish-pox on him!"

"Fish-pox" was her favourite oath. She hated any really obscene words, and whenever the men used them in her presence she would frown and blush, but she never said anything.

Maryutka had given a promise at headquarters and she kept it and no one in the detachment could boast of having one of her affections.

One night a Magyar named Gucsa, who had recently joined their detachment and had been casting longing glances at her for some days, stole up to where she was lying. It ended badly. The Magyar crawled away minus three teeth and plus a big lump on his forehead. Maryutka had treated him to the butt-end of her revolver.

The men enjoyed making harmless jokes at her expense, but in battle they took more care of her than of themselves. This was dictated by some unacknowledged tenderness hidden deep down within them, under the hard surface of their many-coloured leather jackets.

Such, then, were the crimson Yevsukov, Maryutka and the twenty-three, who escaped to the north, into the frozen sands of the endless desert.

It was the time of the year when February whines its stormy tunes. Fluffy snow carpeted the hollows between the mounds of sand, and the sky shrieked above the heads of those who were pushing their way into the storm and the gloom—shrieked with wind. Or perhaps with enemy bullets tearing through the air.

It was hard going. Their ill-shod feet sank deep into the sands and the snow. The hungry mangy camels snorted, howled and spat. The sands, blown into billows by the wind, had the glitter of salt crystals, and for hundreds of miles all around the earth was severed from the sky by a horizon line as clean and definite as if cut with a knife.

This chapter, to tell the truth, has a minor share in my tale. It would have been simpler to have plunged straight into the heart of it. But, among other things, the reader had to know where the remnants of the special Guryev Detachment, which found itself thirty-seven versts north-west of the Kara-Kuduk well, came from, and why there was a girl among them, and why Commissar Yevsukov was crimson.

In a word, it was written only because it *had* to be written.

CHAPTER 2

In which a dark spot appears on the horizon and turns out to be, on closer inspection, Lieutenant of the Guards Govorukha-Otrok

It is seventy versts from the well of Djan-Geldi to the well of Soi-Kuduk, and another sixty-two to the spring at Ushkan.

"Halt! Pitch camp!" said Yevsukov in a frozen voice, pointing to some saksaul roots with his rifle butt.

They made a camp-fire of saksaul twigs. Sooty resinous flames leapt up, and a dark circle of dampness appeared on the sand round the fire.

The men took rice and fat out of their packs. Soon the mixture was boiling in the iron pot, giving off a strong smell of mutton.

Silent, their teeth chattering, the men huddled round the fire, pressing close to one another to keep out the icy fingers of the wind. They warmed their feet by pushing them into the very fire, and the hardened leather of their boots began to crackle and hiss.

Through the white blur of snow came the dismal tinkle of the bells on the hobbled camels.

Yevsukov rolled a cigarette in trembling fingers.

"Got to decide, comrades, where we re to go from here," he forced out in a cloud of smoke.

"Where can we go?" came a lifeless voice from the other side of the fire. "It's all the same. Everything's clear. We can't go back to Guryev—the bloody Cossacks are there. And outside of Guryev there ain't no place to go to."

"What about Khiva?"

"Ho, Khiva! Six hundred versts across the Kara Kum in the dead of winter? What'll you use for food? Or are you going to make a stew of the lice in your pants?"

There was a burst of laughter.

"Everything's clear. We're through," the same lifeless voice summed up.

Yevsukov's heart contracted under his crimson armour, but he gave no sign of it.

"You slobbering louse!" he burst out furiously. "Plenty of time before we're through. Any fool can kick the bucket! But you've got to use a bit of gumption to stay alive."

"We could make for Fort Alexandrovsky. Our own sort lives there. Fishermen."

"No good," put in Yevsukov. "I got word Denikin made a landing there. The Whites are at Alexandrovsky and at Krasnovodsk too."

Somebody groaned in his sleep.

Yevsukov brought a strong hand down on his fire-hot knee.

"Stop yammering!" he barked. "There's only one place to go—to the Aral Sea. We'll go to the Aral and march round it to Kazalinsk. We've got headquarters at Kazalinsk. It'll be like going home to go there."

He barked it out and was silent. Even he did not believe they could make it.

The man lying next to him raised his head.

"And what'll we eat on the way?"

"Got to pull in our belts," snapped Yevsukov. "We ain't the Princes Royal. Maybe it's beefsteaks and honey you'd like? You'll do without. We've still got some rice left and a little flour."

"Won't last more than three days."

"Why not? What of it? It won't take us more than ten to get to Chernysh Bay. We've got six camels. Soon as we've eat up all our supplies we'll kill the camels. They'd be no good to us anyhow. We'll kill one, load the meat on the others and move on. We'll get there somehow."

Nobody said anything. Maryutka lay at the fire with her head in her hands, gazing into the flames with unwinking, cat-like eyes. Yevsukov suddenly felt uncomfortable. He got up and shook the snow off his jacket.

"So that's that," he said. "Orders is, up and off at daybreak." His voice rose jerkily like a startled bird. "Maybe we won't all make it, but we've got to try, because you see it's revolution, comrades. It's for the workers of the world."

The commissar looked each of his twenty-three men in the eye in turn. The light he was accustomed

to seeing in those eyes had gone out. Their gaze was dull and averted. Doubt and despair glinted between narrowed eyelids.

"First we'll eat the camels, then each other," murmured someone.

Silence.

Suddenly Yevsukov shrieked like a hysterical woman.

"Shut your mouth! Have you forgot your revolutionary duty? Silence! An order's an order. If you don't shut up you'll get stood up against the wall!"

He coughed and sat down. The man who was stirring the rice with a ramrod suddenly called gaily into the wind:

"Stop carping and eat your supper. What do you think I've been sweating here for?"

They spooned out big clumps of the greasy swollen rice, burning their throats in their hurry to gobble it down before it got cold. But even so a crust of wax-like fat froze on their lips.

The fire was dying down, throwing up showers of orange sparks against the black curtain of the night. The men huddled closer, drowsed off, snored, moaned and swore in their sleep.

It was almost morning when Yevsukov was shaken out of his sleep. Forcing his frozen lashes apart, he sat up and reached instinctively for his rifle.

"Take it easy."

Maryutka was bending over him. Her cat-like eyes glittered through the yellow-grey murk of the storm.

"What's up?"

"Get up, Comrade Commissár. While you was asleep I took a ride on a camel. There's a Kirghiz caravan coming from Djan-Geldi."

Yevsukov rolled over on his side.

"A caravan?" he repeated excitedly. "Sure you're not dreaming?"

"Sure as fish-pox. Forty camels."

Yevsukov was on his feet in a trice and whistling through his fingers.

The twenty-three found it hard to get up and stretch their stiffened bodies, but on hearing of the caravan they livened up.

Only twenty-two got up. The twenty-third stayed where he was, wrapped in a horse-cloth that shook with the convulsions of his body.

"He's got the blackfire," said Maryutka when she had thrust a finger inside his collar.

"Damn it all! What are we to do? Throw another blanket over him and let him lie. We'll come back for him. Where did you say the caravan was?"

Maryutka pointed to the west.

"Not far off. About six versts. Packs this size on the camels."

"Sounds fine. See you don't let them get away, men! Soon as we set eyes on them, close in on all sides. Don't spare your legs. Half to the left, half to the right. Get going!"

They wound their way in single file between the sand-hills, bent almost double, their spirits rising, their bodies warmed by the quick march.

From the crest of a hill they caught sight of the camels strung out like jet beads on a *takyr* as flat as a hand. The beasts were swaying under the weight of their packs.

"The Lord's sent them. He took pity on us," murmured a pock-marked youth named Gvozdyov.

"The Lord me foot!" burst out Yevsukov. "How many times have you got to be told there ain't no Lord; everything's got its own law of physics."

There was no time to argue. The order was given to advance in quick rushes, hiding in every hollow,

behind every gnarled bush. They clutched their rifles so tightly that their fingers ached. They knew they dared not let the caravan escape, that with the caravan would go their hope, their salvation, their lives.

The caravan advanced leisurely. The men could already make out the bright saddle-bags on the backs of the camels and some men in quilted robes and wolfskin caps walking beside them.

Suddenly Yevsukov, resplendent in his crimson jacket, rose out of the top of a hill and stood with pointed rifle.

"*Tokhta*!" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "If you've got any guns, throw them down! No tricks or it'll be the end of you!"

No sooner had he opened his mouth than the frightened camel-drivers started back and fell down in the sand.

The Red Army men, breathless from their swift march, rushed down on all sides.

"Take the camels, fellows!" shouted Yevsukov.

His voice was drowned out by a round of rifle fire coming from the caravan. The angry bullets yelped like puppies, and someone beside Yevsukov hit the sand with arms outstretched.

"Lie down, men! Give it to the bastards!" shouted Yevsukov, ducking behind a sand-hill.

There was another burst of rifle fire.

The shooting—too accurate for Kirghiz—was coming from behind the camels, which had been made to lie down. The bullets pelted the sand all about the Red Army men, filling the desert with their noise. But gradually the shooting died down.

The Red Army men stole up in little dashes. When they were about thirty paces away Yevsukov saw a head in a fur cap and a white Caucasian hood

protruding above one of the camels. Then he caught sight of the shoulder, and there was a gold shoulder-strap on it.

"Maryutka! Look! An officer!" he said, turning his head to Maryutka, who was crawling behind him.

"I see him."

Leisurely she took aim. The rifle cracked.

Perhaps her fingers were frozen, or perhaps she was trembling with excitement or from running. Whatever the cause, scarcely had she said, "The forty-first, a fish-pox on him!" when the man in the white hood and the blue coat rose up from behind the camel and waved his rifle over his head. From the bayonet fluttered a white handkerchief.

Maryutka hurled her gun down on the sand and burst out crying, smearing the tears over her dirty, wind-burnt face.

Yevsukov ran up to the officer. He was overtaken by a Red Army man who twisted his bayonet as he ran, the better to plunge it in.

"Hands off! Take him alive!" shouted the commissar hoarsely.

The man in the blue coat was seized and thrown down.

Five others who had been with him lay dead behind the camels.

The Red Army men, laughing and swearing, pulled the camels about by the rings in their noses and tied them together in groups.

The Kirghiz camel-drivers followed Yevsukov about and tugged at his sleeve in a hang-dog way. He shook them off, darted away from them, shouted at them, and pointed his revolved at their broad faces—though not without qualms of pity.

"*Tokhta*! Keep off! Orders is orders."

A greybeard in a rich robe caught him by the belt.

"Ui, *bai*," he murmured quickly, ingratiatingly. "*Bai* take camels—very bad. Kirghiz live by camels. No camels— Kirghiz die. No take camels, *bai*. *Bai* want money? Here, take money. Silver money—tsar money. Paper money—Kerensky money. How much you want, *bai*? No take camels."

"Why, you bloody idiot, can't you see it's finish for us without these camels? I'm not stealing them. I'm taking them for the revolution. Orders is orders! Just temporary. You fellows can walk back home from here, but it's death for us."

"Ui, *bai*. Very bad. No take camels. Take *abas*. Take money," pleaded the Kirghiz.

Yevsukov shrugged him off.

"I told you what's what. No more talk. Here, take this receipt and be off with you."

He handed the Kirghiz a receipt scribbled in indelible pencil on a scrap of newspaper.

The Kirghiz threw it away, fell to the ground and buried his face in his hands, moaning. His companions stood silent, and silent tears trembled in their slanting black eyes.

Yevsukov turned away and saw the captured officer; he was standing nonchalantly between two Red Army men, a cigarette in his mouth, his eyes following the commissar contemptuously.

"Who are you?" asked Yevsukov.

"Lieutenant of the Guards Govorukha-Otrok. And who might you be?" the officer asked in his turn, blowing out a cloud of smoke.

As he raised his head Yevsukov and his men were struck by the blazing blueness of his eyes, as if two balls of the finest French bluing were floating in snow-white suds.

CHAPTER 3

Concerning the inconvenience of travelling through the deserts of Central Asia without camels, with a reference to the sensation experienced by Columbus' sailors

Lieutenant Govorukha-Otrok ought to have been Maryutka's forty-first. But for some reason—perhaps because her hands were cold, or perhaps because she was excited—she missed.

And so the lieutenant remained alive, an extra number on the list of the living.

Yevsukov gave orders that he be searched, and the search revealed a secret pocket sewed into the back of his smart suède jacket.

The lieutenant reared like a wild stallion when the fingers of the Red Army man felt out the pocket. But he was held firmly, and only the trembling of his lips and the pallor of his face betrayed his agitation.

Yevsukov carefully unwound the linen wrapping of the packet and his eyes fairly devoured the document it contained. He read it, shook his head, and did some hard thinking.

The document stated that the bearer, Lieutenant Govorukha-Otrok, Vadim Nikolayevich, had been entrusted by the government of Admiral Kolchak, Supreme Ruler of Russia, to represent his person in the Trans-Caspian state headed by General Denikin. A letter attached to the document stated that the bearer was in possession of secret information that was to be conveyed orally to General Dratsenko.

Yevsukov refolded the packet and tucked it safely away in an inner pocket of his jacket.

"Just what is that secret information, Mister Officer? You'd better come out with it and not hold anything back, seeing as you're in the hands of Red

Army men and me being in command: Commissar Arsenty Yevsukov."

The lieutenant turned his ultramarine orbs on Yevsukov, smiled, and snapped his heels together.

"Monsieur Yevsukov? Cha-armed. Unfortunately, I have not been commissioned by my government to carry on diplomatic negotiations with anyone in so exalted a position."

Even Yevsukov's freckles went white. The man was laughing at him in front of the whole detachment.

The commissar snapped out his revolver.

"Look here, you White bastard! None of your lip! Either you spill your information or you swallow some lead."

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders.

"If you kill me I won't spill anything."

The commissar lowered his gun with a curse.

"You'll sing another tune before I'm through with you," he said.

The lieutenant went on smiling with one corner of his mouth.

Yevsukov spat and walked away.

"Are we to give him a round or two, Comrade Commissar?" asked one of the Red Army men.

The commissar scratched his peeling nose with a finger-nail.

"Won't do," said he. "He's a big cheese, he is. We've got to deliver him to Kazalinsk. They'll get his secret out of him there all right."

"You mean, drag him along with us? Lucky if we make it ourselves."

"So we're recruiting White officers now!"

Yevsukov snapped erect.

"Mind your own business," he shouted. "I'm taking him, and I answer for it. Shut up."

As he turned round, his eyes lighted on Maryutka.

"You're the one in charge of His Highness,

Maryutka. Keep your eyes peeled. I'll skin you alive if you let him get away."

Without comment Maryutka slung her rifle over her shoulder and went up to the prisoner.

"Come here, handsome," she said. "You're in my charge, but don't think because I'm a woman you can run away. I'll get you on the run at three hundred paces. I missed once—a fish-pox on you—but don't think it'll happen again."

The lieutenant glanced at her out of the corner of his eye, then made an elaborate bow, his shoulders shaking with laughter.

"I count it an honour to be taken captive by such a charming Amazon," he said.

"What's that you're jabbering?" asked Maryutka, throwing him a withering glance. "A *bourjui*. Most likely you can't do nothing but dance the mazurka. Well, shut your face and get going."

They spent that night on the shore of a little lake. An odour of iodine and decay came from the salt water under the ice.

Wrapping themselves up in the carpets and felt blankets they had pulled off the Kirghiz camels, they slept like the dead.

Maryutka tied the hands and feet of the Lieutenant of the Guards tightly with a camel cord for the night, winding the other end of the cord round her waist and clutching it in her hand.

The men guffawed.

"Hey, boys," cried bulging-eyed Semyanny, "Maryutka's wove a spell round her true love. She give him a love-potion of hemp."

Maryutka turned a scornful look on the hilarious men.

"A fish-pox on the lot of you! You can joke, but what if he runs away?"

"Simpleton! Where'll he run to in the desert?"

"Desert or no desert, this is safer." Then, turning to the prisoner: "Go to sleep, handsome."

Maryutka pushed the lieutenant under the carpet and went off to lie down herself.

It is heaven to sleep under a felt cover or a felt mat. The felt smells of the steppe in July, of wormwood, of vast wastes of sand. The body goes all soft and warm as it sinks into blissful sleep.

Yevsukov is snoring under his carpet, Maryutka lies with a dreamy smile on her face, Lieutenant of the Guards Govorukha-Otrok is sleeping stiffly on his back, his beautiful lips drawn into a fine line.

Only the sentinel is awake. He is sitting on the edge of a mat with his rifle on his knees—his rifle, dearer than wife, dearer than life.

He sits gazing out into the blur of snow where the camel bells are tinkling dully. They have forty-four camels now. Their way is clear. They'll get there now, however hard the going. No more doubts and fears.

The wind rushes past with a shriek, it rushes up the sentinel's sleeve. He hunches his shoulders and pulls a mat up over his back. The icy knives stop stabbing him and a warmness seeps into his numb body.

Snow, gloom, sand.

A strange, Asian country. . . .

"Where's the camels? The camels, God rot you! Asleep! Asleep! What have you gone and done, you bastard! I'll have your hide for this!"

The sentry's head swam from the kick of the foot. He gazed dazedly about him.

Snow and gloom.

Misty gloom, the gloom of the morning. And sand.

The camels are gone.

Where the camels had been, hobbled, they found the hoofprints of camels and the footprints of men, the footprints of sharp-toed Kirghiz *ichigs.*

Three of the Kirghiz must have followed the detachment all night and taken the camels as soon as the sentry fell asleep.

The Red Army men stood in silent groups. No camels. Where were they to look for them? They couldn't overtake them, couldn't find them in the desert.

"Shooting would be too good for a son of a bitch like you," Yevsukov said to the sentry.

The sentry was silent; tears froze into crystal drops on his eyelashes.

The lieutenant wriggled out from under his carpet. He glanced about and gave a little whistle.

"That's revolutionary discipline for you!" he said with a mocking laugh.

"Keep your mouth shut!" roared Yevsukov in fury, adding in a hoarse, unrecognisable whisper: "Well, what're you all standing here for? Get moving!"

Now only eleven men dragged themselves in single file, ragged and reeling, up and down the sand-hills. Ten lay in eternal rest along the cruel way. Almost every morning one of them would open eyes glazed with exhaustion for the last time, stretch out swollen, log-stiff legs and emit hoarse, gasping sounds.

The crimson Yevsukov would come up to the prostrate figure (the commissar's face no longer matched his jacket; it was grey and pinched, and the freckles looked like old copper coins), stare at it and shake his head. Then the icy barrel of his revolver would burn a hole in the sunken temple, leaving a round, black, almost bloodless wound.

They would sprinkle some sand over the body and ontinue on their way.

The men's jackets and trousers hung in shreds, their boots fell off, they wrapped their feet in strips

of carpet, they twisted rags round their frozen fingers.

Now ten pushed on, stumbling ahead, swaying in the wind.

One of them walked serenely erect: Lieutenant of the Guards Govorukha-Otrok.

Frequently the Red Army men would complain to Yevsukov. "How long are we going to drag him with us, Comrade Commissar?" they would say. "Why should we feed him? And then there's his clothes—good clothes. We could divide them up."

But Yevsukov forbade them to touch him.

"I'll hand him over if it's the last thing I do," he said. "There's lots of things he can tell us. We can't make mutton of a man like him. He'll get what's coming to him, have no fear."

The lieutenant's arms were bound at the elbow with a camel cord, the other end of which was tied to Maryutka's belt. Maryutka could hardly drag one foot after the other. The yellowish glitter of her cat-like eyes was particularly striking in her bloodless face. But the lieutenant was all right. He had just grown a little pale.

One day Yevsukov went up to him and stared into his bright blue eyes.

"Damn you!" he burst out hoarsely. "What the hell goes on inside you? Not much flesh on you, but the strength of two."

The lieutenant's lips curved in his usual mocking smile.

"You wouldn't understand. It's the cultural lag. With you the flesh conquers spirit, but my spirit is master of my body. I can order myself not to suffer."

"So that's it," the commissar said thoughtfully.

On every hand rose the sand-hills—soft, shifting, undulating. The sand on the crests hissed and wriggled like snakes in the wind. There seemed to be no end to it.

Now one, now another of the men would fall in the sand, gritting his teeth and groaning in despair: "I can't go on. Leave me here to die in peace."

Yevsukov would curse him, lash him, tell him he was "deserting the Revolution", and he would stagger to his feet and stumble on.

One of the men crawled to the top of a high hill. He stopped, turned his skull-like head and shrieked: "Boys! The Aral Sea!"

Then he fell on his face. With his last strength Yevsukov climbed to the top of the hill. A blinding blueness struck his inflamed eyes. He shut them and scraped at the sand with hooked fingers.

The commissar had never heard of Columbus, and he did not know that his Spanish sailors had scraped at the deck of their ship in the same way on hearing the cry "Land!"

CHAPTER 4

In which Maryutka holds her first conversation with the lieutenant, and the commissar fits out a naval expedition

On the second day they came to a Kirghiz settlement on the shores of the sea. The first sign they had of it was the acrid smell of a dung-fire that came over the sand-hills and made their empty bellies contract spasmodically. Then they caught sight of the low domes of *yurta* dwellings. Finally some shaggy little dogs came dashing up to meet them.

The natives clustered at the entrances to their *yurtas*, gazing in pity and astonishment at these sad remnants of human beings.

An old man with a caved in nose stroked the sparse hairs of his beard and rubbed his chest.

"*Salaam*," he said. "Where you go, *turá*?"

Yevsukov weakly pressed the rough palm that was offered him.

"We're Reds. Headed for Kazalinsk. Take us in, friend, and feed us. The local Soviet will reward you."

The Kirghiz shook his scanty beard and smacked his lips.

"Ui, *bai*. Red Army men. Bolshie. Come Moscow?"

"No, *turá*. Not from Moscow. From Guryev."

"Guryev? Ui, *bai*! Ui, *bai*! Come Kara-Kum?"

The slit-like eyes showed a glint of horror and respect for this faded crimson soldier who, braving the wild winds of February, had crossed the dread Kara-Kum Desert from Guryev to the Aral Sea.

The old man clapped his hands and gave orders in a guttural tongue to the women who came running.

He took the commissar by the hand.

"Come, *turá, kibitka*. Sleep little-little. Then eat."

The men dropped down like inanimate bundles and slept without stirring in the warm *yurtas* until nightfall. When they woke up the Kirghiz fed them pilau, and stroked their protruding shoulder-blades sympathetically.

"Eat, *turá*, eat," they said. "You weak. Eat, you strong."

They ate quickly, greedily. Their bellies grew bloated from the fat food and some of them were sick. They ran out into the sand, relieved themselves, then came back and set to again. At last they went back to sleep, warm and sated.

But Maryutka and the lieutenant did not sleep.

Maryutka sat by the smouldering embers in the brazier, all her past sufferings forgotten. She took a stub of pencil out of her pack and traced some letters on a leaf torn out of the supplement to an illustrated monthly one of the women had given her. This particular leaf carried a portrait of Count

Kokovtsev, Minister of Finance, and across the count's broad forehead and fair beard Maryutka inscribed her scrawling letters.

Around her waist the camel cord was still tied, and the other end was twisted round the hands crossed behind the lieutenant's back. Only for an hour had she released his hands, so that he could eat his fill of pilau. This done, she had secured them again.

The Red Army men tittered.

"Like a dog on a chain," they said.

"Gone soft on him, have you, Maryutka? Then tie him to you, tie him tight. If you don't, a fairy princess'll come on her magic carpet and whisk him away."

Maryutka did not deign to answer.

The lieutenant sat with his back against a post of the *yurta,* his ultramarine eyes focused on the jerky efforts of the pencil.

"What are you writing?" he said, leaning forward.

Maryutka glanced up at him through a dangling lock of auburn hair.

"None of your business."

"Perhaps you'd like to write a letter? Dictate it and I'll write it for you."

Maryutka gave a low laugh.

"Smart, ain't you? Just to get your hands loose to give me a clout and take to your heels. What d'ye take me for, handsome?... And I don't need your help. It's not a letter I'm writing, it's poetry."

The lieutenant's eyelashes flickered in surprise. He strained to get his back away from the post.

"Poetry? Do you write poetry?"

Maryutka flushed and interrupted the pencil's convulsions.

"Why the stare? You think you're the only one can dance the mazurka and I'm an idiot-girl?"

The lieutenant worked his elbows, but the bonds held.

"I don't think anything of the kind. I was just surprised. Do you think the time's suitable for the writing of poetry?"

Maryutka put down her pencil. She tossed back her head and the rusty bronze came spilling over her shoulders.

"Ain't you a funny one, just!" she said. "Does a person have to sleep in a feather-bed to write poetry? What if it's all boiling over inside me? What if I dream night and day of putting it all down—how we crossed that desert, cold and hungry? If only I could make it come tight in people's chests! It's blood I write with. But nobody wants to print it. They say I've got to study first. Study! How's a person to find time to study these days? It comes from my heart, from my simpleness."

The lieutenant gave a slow smile.

"You might read it to me," he said. "I'm interested. I understand something about poetry."

"You wouldn't understand this. Yours is rich man's blood. Sleazy. All you want to write about is flowers and love. I write about poor folk. About revolution," she ended up sadly.

"Why shouldn't I understand?" replied the lieutenant. "Perhaps I myself would never write about such things, but one person can always understand another."

Maryutka hesitantly turned Kokovtsev upside down.

"Oh, the hell! All right, then, listen, but don't dare laugh. I s'pose your papa had a gov'ness for you till you was twenty, but I went all the way myself."

"I wouldn't think of laughing, really."

"All right. I've put it all down—how we fought the Cossacks. and how we escaped into the desert."

Maryutka cleared her throat. Lowering her voice, she hammered out the words, rolling her eyes ferociously:

So the Cossacks fell upon us,
Bloody hangmen of the tsar.
We gave them bullets plenty,
But that didn't get us very far.
Because there were so many of them
We were forced to retreat.
Our Yevsukov, like a hero,
Said the Cossacks must be beat.
We turned machine-guns on them,
We fought like hell that day,
But they wiped out our detachment—
Only twenty got away.

"But I can't for the life of me finish it, a fish-pox on it! I don't know how to get in the camels," said Maryutka in a troubled voice.

The blue of the lieutenant's eyes was in shadow, but the whites gave off violet reflections of the gay little fire in the brazier.

"Good for you!" he said after a pause. "There's a lot of expression and feeling in the lines. Anyone can see they come from the heart." At this point his body jerked and he made a sound like a hiccup, which he covered up by saying hastily: "Please don't take offence, but it's very bad poetry. No skill, no polish."

Maryutka dropped the paper listlessly on her knee and gazed without speaking at the ceiling of the *yurta* for a while. Then she shrugged her shoulders.

"I told you there was feeling in them. Everything inside of me sobs when I tell what happened. As for not being polished—that's what everybody tells me, just like you. 'No polish, so we can't print it.' But how am I to polish it? What's the secret? Look, you're a man with book-learning—can't you tell

me?" In her agitation, Maryutka addressed him almost with respect.

The lieutenant did not answer immediately.

"It's hard to say. You see, the writing of poetry is an art and every art must be studied. It has its own laws and rules. For instance, if an engineer doesn't know the rules for building a bridge, he either won't be able to build one at all, or he will build a bad one, one that cannot be used."

"But that's a bridge. He's got to know numbers and all sorts of clever things for that. But poetry's been inside me ever since I was born. Maybe it's a talent?"

"Perhaps. But even talent must be developed. An engineer is an engineer rather than a doctor because from birth he's had an inclination to build things. But if he doesn't study, nothing will come of his inclination."

"Won't it now? Think of that! Oh, well, a fish-pox on it! Soon's we finish fighting I'll go to a school where they learn you how to write poetry. There are schools like that, aren't there?"

"There must be," said the lieutenant pensively.

"Well, that's where I'll go. I'm just about worn out by this poetry. There's nothing I want so bad as to get it put in a book, and there under every poem'd be my name Maria Basova."

The fire in the brazier died out. In the darkness the wind could be heard rustling the felt covering of the *yurta.*

"Say," said Maryutka suddenly, "them cords must be hurting your hands."

"Not much. Just a little numb."

"If you'll swear on your honour not to run away, I'll untie them for you."

"Where am I to run to? The jackals would get me. I'm not that much of a fool."

"Well, you swear anyway. Repeat it after me: 'I swear by the proletariat who's fighting for their rights and to the Red Army man Maria Basova not to try to run away.' "

The lieutenant repeated the oath.

The loop of the cord was loosened and the swollen wrists released. Blissfully the lieutenant moved his fingers.

"Now, go to sleep," yawned Maryutka. "If you run away now you're the worst louse that ever was. Here's the carpet, pull it up."

"Thanks. I'll cover myself with my coat. Good night, Maria."

"Maria Filatovna," corrected Maryutka with dignity as she pulled the cover over her head.

Yevsukov was anxious to let his whereabouts be known at headquarters. But he had to give his men a chance to sleep and eat and thaw out here in the *aul*. When a week was up he decided to follow the coast until he came to the town of Aralsk, from which he would go direct to Kazalinsk.

At the beginning of the second week some passing Kirghiz told him that an autumn storm had driven a fishing smack up on the shore of a cove about four versts away. They said the boat was undamaged and was lying unclaimed on the beach. The fishermen must have drowned.

The commissar went to inspect it.

The smack turned out to be of sturdy oak, almost new. The only damage the storm had done was to tear the sail and break the rudder.

After consulting his men, Yevsukov decided to send a group by boat to the mouth of the Syr Darya. The smack could easily accommodate four people and a normal load of supplies.

"That'll be better," said the commissar. "In the first place, we'll hand over our prisoner. After all,

who knows what might happen on the march? And we've got to get him there at all costs. And second, they'll know where we are and send out some cavalrymen to bring us clothes and things. If there's a good wind you can cross the Aral in three or four days and be in Kazalinsk on the fifth."

Yevsukov wrote a report and sewed it into a canvas packet along with the lieutenant's documents, which he had been carrying all this time in the inner pocket of his jacket.

The Kirghiz women mended the sail and the commissar himself made a new rudder of broken boards.

On a cold February morning when the low-hanging sun was a polished brass plate above a flat expanse of turquoise, a string of camels drew the smack out to the edge of the ring of ice.

They launched it in the open sea and the passengers went aboard.

Yevsukov said to Maryutka:

"You're in charge. You answer for everything. Keep your eyes on that officer. You'll be sorry you ever got born if you let him get away. See he gets there alive or dead. If you run foul of the Whites, don't give him up alive. Well, be off."

CHAPTER 5

Stolen from beginning to end from Daniel Defoe, except that Robinson has not long to wait for his Friday

The Aral is not a cheerful sea.

Flat shores overgrown by wormwood. Sands. Low hills.

Islands in the Aral Sea lie flat like pancakes on a frying-pen, and are hard to detect.

No birds. No foliage. No signs of human life, except in summer.

The biggest island in the Aral is called Barsa-Kelmes.

No one knows what this name really means, but the Kirghiz say it means "Island of Death".

In summer fishermen from the town of Aralsk go out to Barsa-Kelmes. The fishing is excellent. The sea fairly seethes with fish. But when the white caps appear in autumn, the fishermen take refuge in the quiet cove of Aralsk and stay there until spring.

If the storms set in before they have had time to transfer their whole catch to the mainland, the salt fish is left in wooden sheds on the island for the winter.

During severe winters, when the sea freezes over from the Bay of Chernyshov to the very Island of Barsa-Kelmes, the jackals have a fine time of it. They run over the ice to the island and feast themselves on salted barbel or carp until their bellies burst. In that case the fishermen do not find the remains of their catch in the spring, when the flooding of the Syr Darya, red with clay, crushes the ice.

From November to February storms rage up and down. The rest of the time there are only little rains, and in the summer the Aral is as smooth as a mirror.

A dull sea, the Aral.

It has only one beauty—the amazing blue of its waters.

A deep blue, a velvety blue, with the sparkle of sapphire.

Any geography book will tell you that.

On sending off Maryutka and the lieutenant, the commissar counted on quiet weather for a week or so. The old men of the settlement said the signs indicated quiet weather.

And so the smack with Maryutka, the lieutenant and two Red Army men in it (Semyanny and

Vyakhir, chosen because they had some knowledge of seafaring) set out for Kazalinsk.

A steady breeze filled the sail and rippled the water cheerily. The rudder creaked in a lulling way, and thick white foam curled away from the prow.

Maryutka untied the lieutenant's hands. There was nowhere a man could run away to from a boat—and Lieutenant Govorukha-Otrok took turns at the tiller with Semyanny and Vyakhir.

He steered himself into captivity.

When it was not his spell he lay on the bottom of the boat under a rug, smiling at his thoughts—secret thoughts, officer-thoughts, incomprehensible to anyone but himself.

This worried Maryutka.

"Why should he wear that grin all the time? As if he was going to a picnic. But it's clear what'll happen to him—a cross-examination and . . . good-bye. He's wrong in the head if you ask me."

But the lieutenant went on smiling, unaware of Maryutka's opinion.

At last her curiosity got the better of her.

"Where did you learn to handle a boat?" she said.

The lieutenant considered a moment.

"In St. Petersburg," he said. "I had a yacht. A big one. I went to sea in it."

"Yacht?"

"A sailing-vessel."

"I know that as well as you. I saw plenty of yachts in Astrakhan. The *bourjuis* had as many as you like. All white. Tall and graceful as swans. That wasn't what I meant. What was her name?

"Nelly."

"Strange name."

"My sister's name. I named the yacht after her."

"Good Christians don't have names like that."

"Her name was Yelena. But we called her Nelly in the English manner."

Maryutka gazed silently at the pale sun pouring its cold white honey over everything. It was slipping down the sky to meet the blue of the water.

"This water! Blue as blue!" she said at last. "The Caspian's green. Did you ever see anything as blue as this?"

"According to Forel, it's number three," murmured the lieutenant, as if to himself.

"What's that?" said Maryutka, turning to him alertly.

"I was just talking to myself. About the water. I read in some book on hydrography that the water of this sea is a very bright blue. A scientist named Forel charted the colours of various bodies of water. The bluest is the Pacific Ocean. According to his chart, the Aral is number three."

Maryutka half closed her eyes as if to conjure up a picture of this chart showing different intensities of blue.

"It'd be hard to think of anything bluer than this. As blue as. . . ." Suddenly her own yellow, catlike eyes came to rest on the lieutenant's ultramarine ones. She started forward and a thrill went through her whole body, as if she had made some extraordinary discovery. Her lips parted in amazement. She murmured, "Your eyes are the same—the very, very same. I thought there was something familiar about this sea."

The lieutenant said nothing.

Orange blood splashed the horizon. The water in the distance was blue with inky shadows in it. An icy breeze came off the surface of the sea.

"From the east," said Semyanny, pulling the rags of his uniform round him.

"Looks like a storm," said Vyakhin.

"Let it blow. In another two hours we'll be in sight of Barsa. If there's a wind we'll put in for the night."

Silence. The boat began to toss on the dark crests of the waves. Shreds of cloud were drawn across the grey-black sky.

"Sure enough—a storm."

"We'll be in sight of Barsa soon. Ought to be off there to port. Hell of a place, Barsa. Sand-banks everywhere. And wind. Pull in the sail, damn you! Pull it in! It ain't the general's suspenders!"

But the lieutenant was too late. The boat dipped over and a splash of foam struck the faces of its passengers.

"Why are you shouting at me? Maria Filatovna let the tiller slip."

"*I* let the tiller slip? Mind what you're saying, you fish-pox! I've had a tiller in my hand since I was five years old!"

The boat was pursued by towering black waves that snapped at its sides like dragons with dripping jaws.

"God Almighty! Where's that bloody Barsa? It's as black as hell."

Vyakhir looked to the left.

"Hooray! There she is!" he shouted joyfully.

A pale streak gleamed whitely through the foam and the gloom.

"Hard a-port!" shouted Semyanny. "God willing, we may reach it."

The prow made a cracking sound, the beams groaned. A wave broke over the sides, leaving the passengers ankle-deep in water.

"Bail her out!" screamed Maryutka, jumping to her feet.

"Bail? Nothing to bail with."

"Your caps!"

Semyanny and Vyakhir tore off their caps and began feverishly bailing out the water. The lieutenant hesitated a moment, then pulled off his Finnish fur cap and joined in.

The gleaming white strip came rushing towards the boat and became visible as a flat beach covered with snow. It was made whiter than ever by seething foam.

The wind raged, hissed, howled, driving the smashing waves higher and higher. In a wild burst it attacked the sail, thrusting it out like a bloated belly.

The worn canvas burst with a report like a cannon shot.

Semyanny and Vyakhir rushed to the mast.

"Hold her!" shouted Maryutka, who was lying on the tiller.

A roaring wave rushed on them from behind and laid the boat on its side, pouring over it in a cold, glassy stream.

When the boat righted it was flooded almost to the gunwale and neither Semyanny nor Vyakhir were to be seen. The rags of the torn sail streamed wet in the wind.

The lieutenant was sitting up to his waist in water crossing himself with quick little movements.

"God damn you! Bail out the water!" cried Maryutka.

He jumped up like a wet puppy and started bailing.

"Semya-a-anny! Vya-a-akhir!" called Maryutka into the night, into the wind, into the clamour.

There was no response.

"Drowned, the poor bastards!"

The wind drove the flooded boat towards shore. The waters churned. The keel struck bottom.

"Out!" shouted Maryutka, leaping into the water. The lieutenant followed her.

"Haul her in!"

Blinded by the splashing water, buffeted by the waves, they seized the boat. It ground heavily into the sand. Maryutka seized the rifles.

"Get out them sacks of food."

The lieutenant meekly obeyed. On reaching a dry spot Maryutka dropped the rifles in the sand. The lieutenant put down the sacks.

Once more Maryutka called into the darkness:

"Semya-a-anny! . . . Vya-a-akhir!. . ."

No answer.

She sat down on the sacks and cried like a woman.

The lieutenant stood behind her, his teeth chattering. But he managed to shrug his shoulders and say to the wind: "Robinson Crusoe and his good man Friday."

CHAPTER 6

Recording the second conversation and explaining the harmful effects of sea bathing at a temperature of 2 degrees above freezing-point

The lieutenant touched Maryutka on the shoulder. He tried to say something, but his teeth were chattering too violently. He thrust his fist under his jaw to stop its shaking.

"Crying won't help," he managed to get out. "We must move about. We'll freeze if we sit here."

Maryutka lifted her head.

"Where shall we move to?" she said hopelessly. "This is an island. Nothing but water all around."

"Even so we've got to move. We'll find a shed somewhere."

"How do you know? Was you ever here?"

"No, but when I was a schoolboy I read that the fishermen build sheds on this island to keep their catch in. We've got to find one of those sheds."

"And if we find one, what then?"

"We'll see in the morning. Get up, Friday"

Maryutka gave him a frightened look.

"God, the man's daft. What'll I do with him? It ain't Friday, handsome, it's Wednesday."

"That's all right; don't mind what I say. We'll discuss that later. Get up."

Maryutka got up obediently. The lieutenant stooped down to pick up the rifles, but she pushed his hand away.

"No fooling! You gave me your word you wouldn't make a dash for it."

The lieutenant withdrew his hand and went off into peals of hoarse, wild laughter.

"You're the one that's daft it seems, not me. Use your imagination, silly. How could I make a dash for it here? I just wanted to help you with the rifles. They're heavy."

Maryutka was reassured.

"Thanks for the help," she said softly and seriously. "But I've been ordered to deliver you to headquarters, so I can't let you have a gun."

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders and picked up the sacks. He walked ahead of her.

The sand, mixed with snow, crunched under their feet.There seemed to be no end to this low, sickeningly flat beach.

In the distance loomed something grey covered with snow.

Maryutka staggered under the weight of three rifles.

"Cheer up, Maria Filatovna! We're almost there. That must be a shed."

"If only it is! I'm done in. And frozen stiff."

They ducked into the shed. It was black as ink inside and filled with a nauseating smell of dampness and salt fish.

As the lieutenant groped his way he felt the stacks of fish.

"Fish! At least we won't starve to death."

"If only we had a light! If we could see, we might find a corner sheltered from the wind," groaned Maryutka.

"You can hardly expect to find electricity in a place like this."

"We could burn the fish. Look how oily they are."

The lieutenant laughed again.

"Burn the fish? You certainly *are* daft."

"Why?" said Maryutka testily. "Where I come from on the Volga we burnt as much as you like. Fish burn better than logs."

"It's the first time I ever heard that. But how will we set fire to them? I've got a flint, but what about chips. . . ."

"Oh, you softy. Anyone can see you was brought up hanging on your mamma's skirts. Here, take these cartridges apart and I'll get some chips off the wall."

The lieutenant's fingers were so frozen he could hardly take apart three cartridges. Maryutka almost fell over him in the darkness as she came back with her chips.

"Sprinkle the gunpowder here. In a little pile. Let's have the flint."

They twisted a rag into a fuse, and it smouldered like a little orange eye in the darkness. Maryutka thrust it into the gunpowder. With a hiss, it burst into slow yellow flames, licking up the dry chips.

"It's burning!" cried Maryutka joyfully. "Bring some fish. Bring carp—they're the fattest."

They laid the fish in neat piles on the burning chips. It sizzled, then burst into bright, hot flames.

"All we've got to do is feed it now. There's enough fish to last six months."

Maryutka glanced about her. The flames threw dancing shadows on the enormous stacks of fish. The wooden walls of the shed were full of cracks and holes.

Maryutka went to inspect the shed.

"Here's a corner without any holes in the walls!" she called out suddenly. "Pile on the fish, don't let

the fire go out! I'll clean out this place. We'll have a decent corner to live in."

The lieutenant sat down beside the fire, hunching his shoulders as the warmth crept into him. Swish! Flop! Maryutka was throwing the fish about in her corner.

"Everything's ready!" she called out at last. "Bring a light."

The lieutenant picked up a burning carp by the tail and went to look. Maryutka had made walls of fish on three sides, forming an open space about six feet square.

"Climb in and light another fire. I've laid some fish in the middle. Now I'll bring our supplies."

The lieutenant held the burning carp under the little pile of fish. Slowly, reluctantly, it caught fire. Maryutka came back, stood the rifles against the wall and threw down the sacks.

"Damn it all!" she exclaimed. "What did those two fellows have to go and get drowned for?"

"It would be a good idea to dry our clothes. We'll catch cold if we don't," the lieutenant said.

"Then why don't we? The fire's hot enough. We'll take them off and dry them."

The lieutenant squirmed.

"You dry your first, Maria Filatovna. I'll go out and wait, then I'll dry mine."

Maryutka looked pityingly at his quivering face.

"You're a fool if there ever was one. A real *bourjui.* What are you scared of. Ain't you never seen a naked woman?"

"Oh, it's not that. I just thought you might not—"

"Bosh! We're all made of the same flesh and blood. Take your clothes off, idiot!" she almost shouted. "Your teeth's chattering like a machine-gun. A fine time I'm going to have with you, I can see that!"

Steam rose from the wet clothes hung over the rifles. The lieutenant and Maryutka sat opposite each other by the fire, blissfully warming themselves in the heat of the flames.

"How white you are, fish-pox! You look as if you'd been washed in cream!"

The lieutenant flushed crimson and turned his head. He was about to say something but, noticing the yellow glow on Maryutka's breast, lowered his greenish-blue eyes. Maryutka threw a leather jacket over her shoulders.

"Time to snooze. Maybe the storm will be over in the morning. We're lucky the boat didn't go to the bottom. If the sea's calm we may be able to get as far as the Syr Darya. We'll find fishermen there. Lie down, I'll watch the fire. Soon's I feel myself falling asleep I'll wake you up. We'll watch in turns."

The lieutenant put his clothes under him and covered himself with his coat. He tossed and groaned in his sleep. Maryutka watched him without moving. Then she shrugged her shoulders.

"A nice how-d'ye-do!" she said. "Sickly, he turns out. What if he's caught cold? I guess they kept him wrapped in velvet at home. Eh, what a life! A fish-pox on it!"

In the morning, when the light glimmered through the chinks in the roof, Maryutka woke up the lieutenant.

"You watch the fire, hear? I'm going to run down to the beach. Maybe our fellows managed to swim to shore."

The lieutenant got up with difficulty.

"I've got a headache," he said dully, holding his head.

"That's natural—from the smoke and the tiredness. It'll pass. Take some hard-tack out of the sack and fry yourself some fish."

She picked up her rifle, wiped it on her leather jacket, and went out.

The lieutenant crawled to the fire and took some sea-soaked hard-tack out of the sack. He bit into it, chewed listlessly, dropped it, and collapsed on the floor beside the fire.

Maryutka shook the lieutenant by the shoulder.

"Get up! Get up, damn you! We're done for!"

The lieutenant's eyes opened wide and his lips parted.

"Get up, I tell you! We're in for it now! The boat's washed away! We're done for now!"

The lieutenant stared at her in silence.

Maryutka stared back, then gave a little gasp.

The lieutenant's ultramarine eyes were filmy and vacant. The cheek that dropped heavily against her hand was on fire.

"So you did catch cold, you gutless scarecrow! What am I going to do with you?"

The lieutenant's lips moved.

Maryutka bent down.

"Mikhail Ivanovich, don't give me a bad mark.... I couldn't learn it.... I'll have it ready tomorrow...."

"What're you raving about?" said Maryutka with a little start.

"Look, Rover!... Grouse!" he suddenly shouted, raising himself up.

Maryutka shrank back and covered her face with her hands.

The lieutenant fell back again, digging his fingers into the sand, muttering incoherently.

Maryutka darted a despairing look at him. The next moment she had taken off her jacket and thrown it on the ground; with difficulty she dragged the limp body of the lieutenant on to it, covering him with his coat. Then she sank down in a

sad little heap beside him, slow tears stealing down her thin cheeks.

The lieutenant tossed as he lay, throwing off the coat, but Maryutka stubbornly replaced it and tucked it tightly up to his very chin. Whenever his head slipped down on to the floor she propped it up again. Rolling up her eyes, she addressed what must have been heaven:

"Maybe he'll die. What'll I tell Yevsukov then? Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear!"

She leaned over his burning body and looked into his filmy blue eyes.

A stab of pity pierced her heart. Reaching out, she gently stroked the curly hair that was matted from tossing. She took his head in her hands and murmured tenderly, "You blue-eyed silly, you!"

CHAPTER 7

Which is baffling at the beginning, but becomes clear in the end

Silver trumpets with bells on them.

The trumpets sound, the bells tinkle softly, like ice:

"Ting-a-ling-a-ling!"

"Ding-a-ling-a-ling!"

"Toot-toot, toot-toot!" blare the trumpets.

A march. No question about it—a march. The march that is always played during dress parades.

And the same square, spattered with sun falling through the green silk of the maples.

The band-master is leading the band. He is standing with his back to the band, and through the slit in his greatcoat his tail sticks out—a big red fox tail—and at the end of his tail there is a gold ball, and in the gold ball there is a tuning-fork.

The tail waves from side to side, the fork gives the instruments their key and shows the cornets and trombones when to join in, and whenever a musician yawns he gets a rap on the forehead with it.

The musicians are doing their best. Very amusing musicians. Just ordinary soldiers, guardsmen from various regiments. An all-army band.

But the musicians have no mouth. Perfectly smooth under their noses. The trumpets are thrust into their left nostrils.

They breathe with their right nostrils, blow with their left, and that gives the trumpets a very special tone—very gay and ringing.

"Ten-shun! Begin the music!"

"Shoulder arms!"

"Re-gi-ment!"

"Bat-ta-lion!"

"Com-pa-ny!"

"Battalion One—forward, march!"

Trumpets: "Toot-toot!" Bells: "Ting-a-ling-a-ling!"

Captain Shvetsov prances ahead on his glossy bay. The captain's behind is as tight and smooth as a ham. Tap-tap-tap!

"Good for you, fellows!"

"Tweedle-dum, tweedle-dee."

"Lieutenant!"

"Lieutenant! The General is asking for the Lieutenant!"

"Which lieutenant?"

"From Company Three. The General is asking for Lieutenant Govorukha-Otrok!"

The General is on horseback in the middle of the square. His face is red, his whiskers are white.

"What does this nonsense mean, Lieutenant?"

"Ha-ha! Ho-ho! Hee-hee!"

"Are you mad? How dare you laugh? I'll.... I'll.... Do you realise who you're speaking to?"

"Ha-ha! Hee-hee! You're no General. You're a cat, sir!"

The General is on horseback in the middle of the square. Down to his waist he's a general, the rest of him is a cat. Not even a pedigreed cat. Just an ordinary tomcat—mangy grey-and-black. The sort that can be found in any backyard.

He clutches the stirrups with his paws.

"I shall have you court-martialled, Lieutenant! Unheard of! A guardsman, an officer, with his intestines showing!"

The lieutenant looked down and nearly fainted. True enough, out from under his scarf his intestines were protruding, very thin and of a greenish hue, and they were fastened to his belly-button, which was whirling round with dizzying speed. He seized his intestines but they wriggled out of his grasp.

"Arrest him for breaking his oath!"

The General drew one paw out of the stirrup, opened the claws, and reached for the lieutenant. On the paw was a silver spur set with an eye.

Just an ordinary eye. Round and yellow, and it looked into the very heart of the lieutenant.

It winked at him tenderly and began to speak. How an eye could speak nobody knows, but it spoke just the same.

"Don't be afraid," it said. "Don't be afraid. You're pulled through."

A hand raised the lieutenant's head and he opened his eyes to see a thin little face with a lock of auburn hair falling over the eyes—tender yellow eyes just like in the spur.

"What a fright you've given me, poor man! For a whole week I've been nursing you. I thought you was a goner. And us all alone on this island. No medicine, nobody to help. I pulled you through on

nothing but boiled water. First you threw it all up. Foul water. Salty. Stomach wouldn't take it."

With difficulty the lieutenant grasped the meaning of these gentle, anxious words.

He raised his head slightly and gazed round with uncomprehending eyes.

Piles of fish everywhere. A fire burning. A kettle hanging from a tripod. Water boiling.

"What is it? Where am I?"

"Have you forgot? Don't you know me? Maryutka."

The lieutenant rubbed his forehead with a transparent hand. Remembering, he gave a faint smile.

"Ah, yes. Robinson and Friday."

"Oh, dear! Off again. You've got that Friday on the brain. I don't know what day it really is. I've lost count."

The lieutenant smiled again.

"I don't mean the day. It's a name. There's a story about how a man found himself on a desert island after a shipwreck. He had a man named Friday. Haven't you ever read it?" He dropped back on the jacket and coughed.

"No. I've read lots of stories, but not that one. But you lie down. Lie still, don't move, else you'll get sick again. I'll boil some fish. You'll get strong once you start eating again. You ain't had a thing in your mouth but water this whole week. A body can see straight through you. Lie down."

The lieutenant closed his eyes weakly. His head was full of the ringing of bells. This reminded him of the trumpets with the bells on them and he gave a quiet laugh.

"What is it?" asked Maryutka.

"Nothing in particular. I just remembered a funny dream I had when I was delirious."

"You kept crying out. Giving orders, swearing. What a time I had! The wind howling, nobody

anywhere about, me all alone with you on this island, and you off your chump. Wasn't I scared, just!" She gave a little shudder. "I didn't know what to do."

"How did you manage?"

"I don't know myself. Most of all I was scared you'd die of starvation. I had nothing but water to give you. I crumbled all the hard-tack that was left into the water you drank, and when it was gone there was nothing but fish. What's salt fish for a sick man? Wasn't I just glad when you began to come to!"

The lieutenant reached out and put his long fingers, beautiful in spite of the dirt, on Maryutka's arm.

"Thanks, Maryutka," he said, stroking her arm gently.

She blushed and pushed his hand away.

"Don't thank me. It's only natural. I'm not a beast to let a man die."

"But after all, I'm an officer ... your enemy. Why should you have bothered to save me? You're half-dead yourself."

There was a moment's pause of puzzlement. But presently Maryutka dismissed her problem with a wave of her hand and a little laugh.

"Enemy—you? Why, you can't even lift a finger. A fine enemy! It's my fate, I guess. I didn't shoot you straight off—missed my aim for the first time in my life, and so it's my fate to worry along with you to the end. Here, eat this."

She held out a pot in which an amber chunk of sturgeon floated. The delicate flesh gave off a mild, tempting odour. The lieutenant took out the fish and ate it with relish.

"But it's terribly salty. It burns your throat."

"Can't be helped. If there was fresh water I could

soak the salt out of it, but there ain't. Salt fish and salt water a fish-pox on them both!"

The lieutenant pushed the pot away.

"What's the matter, had enough?"

"Yes, thanks. You eat some."

"Me? I've ate nothing else for a week—it won't go down any more."

The lieutenant lay back propped up on his elbow.

"If only I had a smoke!" He sighed.

"A smoke? Why didn't you say so sooner? I found some tobacco in Semyanny's sack. It got a little wet, but I dried it. I knew you'd want to smoke. A smoker gets the longing worst after he's been ill. Here, take it."

The lieutenant was touched. He took the pouch in trembling fingers.

"You're a jewel, Maryutka. Better than any nursemaid."

"I guess blokes like you can't live without a nursemaid," said Maryutka drily, then blushed.

"I haven't any paper to roll a cigarette with. That Crimson of yours took every bit of paper I had, and I've lost my pipe."

"Paper?" Maryutka considered.

With a decisive movement she turned back the jacket lying on the lieutenant's knees, thrust her hand into the pocket, and pulled out a little bundle of paper. Untying the string, she held out a few sheets.

"Here's some," she said.

He took the papers and glanced at them. Then he looked at Maryutka. His eyes were full of blue consternation.

"But this is your poetry! Are you mad? I won't take them."

"Go ahead, damn it all! Don't go tearing the heart out of me, you fish-pox!" shouted Maryutka.

The lieutenant looked at her.

"Thank you, Maryutka. I'll never forget this."

He tore off a tiny corner, rolled a cigarette, and lighted up. Then he lay gazing into space through the blue tendril of smoke curling up from his cigarette.

Maryutka gazed at him intently. Suddenly she said:

"There's one thing I can't make out. What makes your eyes so blue? I never seen eyes like that in my life. They're so blue you could drown in them."

"I don't know," said the lieutenant. "I was born with them. Lots of people have told me they were an unusual colour."

"And so they are. Soon as we took you prisoner I thought: what makes his eyes like that? They're dangerous, they are."

"For whom?"

"For women. They slip right inside of you before you know it. Stir a person up."

"Do they stir you up?"

Maryutka flared.

"Don't be so nosy—keep your questions to yourself. Lie down, I'm going for water."

She rose and picked up the pot nonchalantly, but as she went to the other side of the stacked fish she looked back gaily and said again, in the same tone:

"You blue-eyed silly, you!"

CHAPTER 8

For which no explanations are needed

March sun. Spring in the air.

March sun over the Aral Sea, over a sweep of blue velvet. It caresses, it bites with hot little teeth, it stirs up the blood.

For three days, now, the lieutenant has taken the air.

He sits outside the shed, warming himself in the sun, gazing about him with eyes that are alive and joyful, and blue as the deep blue sea.

Maryutka has been exploring the island.

From her last excursion she came back at sunset, elated.

"Tomorrow we're moving," she said.

"Where to?"

"Over there—about eight versts from here."

"What's there?"

"A fisherman's shanty. Like a palace! Dry, sound, even the glass in the windows is whole. It's got a stove and some broken dishes—they'll all come in handy. Best of all, it's got sleeping-bunks—no more sprawling on the floor. If only we'd gone there in the first place!"

"But we didn't know about it."

"That's just it. And I've discovered something else, too—a wonderful discovery."

"What?"

"Some food behind the stove. I guess that's where the fishermen kept their supplies, and they left the remains behind. Some rice and about half a pood of flour. Sort of mildewed, but it can be ate. Maybe they saw an autumn storm coming and rushed away without bothering to take it with them. We'll get on like a house on fire now!"

The next morning they set out for their new quarters. Maryutka walked ahead, loaded down like a camel. She wouldn't let the lieutenant carry anything.

"You mustn't. It'll put you down again. Not worth it. Never fear. I'll manage. I'm skinny, but I'm strong."

By noon they were there. They dug away the snow, tied the door to its broken hinge, stuffed the

stove with carp, lighted it, and warmed themselves at the fire with happy smiles on their faces.

"Swells, aren't we? This is the life!"

"You're a wonder, Maryutka. I'll be grateful to you my whole life. I'd have died if it hadn't been for you."

"Course you would, you mamma's boy."

She held her hands out and warmed them at the fire.

"Warm as warm. Well, what are we going to do now?"

"Wait. What else?"

"Wait for what?"

"Spring. It won't be long now. It's the middle of March. In another week or two the fishermen will be coming for their fish and they'll rescue us."

"I hope you're right. You and me can't last much longer on this fish and mildewed flour. Another two weeks and it's the fish-pox for us!"

"What's that expression you're always using—a fish-pox? Where did you get it?"

"In Astrakhan. All our fishermen say it. Instead of real swearing. I don't like dirty words, but when my dander's up I've got to say something. That's how I let off steam."

She stirred the fish in the stove with a ramrod.

"You once said you knew a story about a desert island, remember? About Friday. Tell it to me now instead of just sitting here. It's awful how I love to listen to stories! The village women used to come to my aunt's house and bring old Gugnikha to tell stories. She must have been a hundred years old, or even more. Remembered Napoleon. I'd crouch in a corner and listen, afraid to breathe for fear I'd miss a word."

"You want to hear about Robinson Crusoe? I've forgotten half of it, it's been so long since I read it."

"Try to remember. Tell me whatever comes back to you."

"I'll try."

The lieutenant half closed his eyes, searching his memory. Maryutka spread out her sheepskin jacket on the bunk and curled up in the corner nearest the stove.

"Come and sit over here. It's warmer here in the corner," she said.

The lieutenant sat down beside her. The fire gave off a cheering warmth.

"Well, why don't you begin? I can't wait—there's nothing I like better than a story."

The lieutenant put his chin in his hand and began:

"Once upon a time a rich man lived in a town of Liverpool. His name was Robinson Crusoe. . . ."

"Where's that town?"

"In England. As I was saying, there lived a rich man named—"

"Wait. You say he was rich? Why is it all the stories are about rich folk, about princes and princesses? Why don't they make up stories about poor folk?"

"I don't know," said the lieutenant. "I never thought about it."

"I s'pose it's because it's the rich people themselves who make up the stories. Like with me. I want to write poetry, but I don't have the learning. If I did, I'd write poetry about poor people. Oh, well, I'll learn some day and I'll write it."

"And so this Robinson Crusoe got the idea of setting off on a voyage that would take him round the world. He wanted to see how other people lived. One day he set out in a big sailing-vessel. . . ."

The stove crackled cheerily and the lieutenant's words poured out in a steady stream.

Little by little the story came back to him—every little detail.

Maryutka listened with bated breath, giving little gasps at the most exciting places.

When the lieutenant described the shipwreck, she shrugged her shoulders incredulously.

"And everybody but him got drowned?" she asked.

"Everybody."

"The captain must've been a blockhead, or else he got soaked to the gills on the eve of the wreck. A good captain'd never let his whole crew get drowned. We've had lots of wrecks on the Caspian, but never more than two or three men got drowned. The rest always got saved."

"But we lost Semyanny and Vyakhir, didn't we? Does that mean you were a bad captain? Or perhaps you were soaked to the gills?"

Maryutka gasped.

"Sharp, ain't you, fish-pox! Get on with the story!"

When he got to the place where man Friday put in an appearance, Maryutka interrupted him again:

"So that's why you called me Friday, is it? Like as if you was Robinson Crusoe. And you say Friday was black? A Negro? I saw a Negro once—at the circus in Astrakhan."

When the lieutenant described the attack of the pirates, Maryutka's eyes flashed.

"Ten against one? Dirty, wasn't it?"

At last the story was over.

Maryutka sat silent for a while, nestling against his shoulder.

"It was lovely," she murmured at last. "I bet you know lots of stories, don't you? Tell me one every day."

"Did you really enjoy it so?"

"Lots and lots. Made the shiver run up and down my spine. You'll tell me stories every evening, won't you? It'll make the time pass quicker."

The lieutenant yawned.

"Sleepy?"

"No, I just haven't got my strength back yet."

"Poor little boy!"

Again Maryutka stretched out her hand and gently stroked his hair. He turned astonished blue eyes on her. In their depths a spark of tenderness was kindled that flew to Maryutka's heart. Dazed, she strained towards him and pressed her dry parched lips against his bristling wasted cheek.

CHAPTER 9

In which it is proved that, although the heart defies all laws, one's being, after all, determines one's consciousness

Lieutenant of the Guards Govorukha-Otrok was to have been the forty-first on Maryutka's death list.

He became first in her list of joys.

She developed a tender yearning for him, for his slender hands, for his soft voice, and above all, for his extraordinary blue eyes.

Her world was irradiated with this blueness. She became oblivious of the dismal Aral Sea and the nauseating taste of salt fish and mildewed flour. Gone was her longing to be part of the raging roaring life beyond the dark expanses of water. During the day she had her tasks: she baked cakes of the flour, boiled the odious sturgeon (which was causing little ulcers to appear on their gums), and sometimes she went down to the beach to see if the longed-for sail were not tipping towards them over the waves.

In the evening when the greedy sun rolled out of the vernal sky, she sat in her corner of the bunk, nestling happily against the lieutenant's shoulder and listening.

The lieutenant told her many stories. He was a good story-teller.

The days rolled by slowly, heavily, like the waves.

One day, while basking in the sun near their shanty, the lieutenant narrowed his eyes and shrugged his shoulders as he watched Maryutka scaling a fat carp with her usual dexterity.

"Hm. What utter rot!" he said.

"What's that, darling?"

"Rot, I say. Life. Utter rot. Primary conceptions, cultivated views—a lot of claptrap. Conventional symbols, like those on a topographical map. Lieutenant of the Guards? To hell with all the Lieutenants of the Guards, I want to live. I've been alive for twenty-seven years, but I haven't lived yet. I squandered heaps of money, I travelled from one country to another in search of an ideal, and all the while I felt nothing but a great emptiness sucking at my vitals. If anyone had told me then that I would spend the most meaningful days of my life here, on this idiotic pancake of an island in the midst of this idiotic sea, I would never have believed him."

"What's that? What sort of days did you say?"

"The most meaningful. Do you understand? How can I put it so that you will understand? Days when I have not felt myself pitted against the whole world, an isolated unit struggling single-handed, but one merged completely with all this." He took in the universe with a sweep of his hand. "I feel myself inseverably a part of it all. Its breath is my breath. The breath of the tide, for instance—hear it? Swish, swish. It's not the sea breathing, it's me—my spirit and my flesh."

Maryutka put down her knife.

"That's putting it in the grand style. I don't get all the words. I'd just say—I'm happy here."

"The words are different but the meaning is the same. At present I should like never to leave the warmth of these absurd sands—to remain here for ever, to melt in the heat of this ragged sun and live the life of a contented beast."

Maryutka stared intently at the sand as if recalling something. Then she gave a tender, guilty little smile.

"The hell! I wouldn't stay here," she said. "It's too easy. Makes a person soft. There's not even anyone to show your happiness to. Nothing but dead fish. If only the fishermen would hurry and come! March must be almost over. I'm sick for the sight of live humans."

"Aren't we live humans?"

"We still are, but in a week's time, when even the dregs of that stinking flour is gone and the scurvy lets loose in us, what sort of a tune will you sing then? And besides, darling, you forget this is no time to loll on the stove-shelf. Our men are fighting out there, spilling their blood. Every hand is needed. How can I sit back and enjoy myself at a time like this? That's not what I took my army oath for."

The lieutenant's eyes flashed his surprise.

"Do you mean you intend going back to the army?"

"What else?"

The lieutenant played with a splinter he had broken off the door-post, and his voice flowed on in a deep rich stream.

"You foolish girl. This is what I wanted to say to you, Maryutka: I'm sick to death of all this bloodshed. How many years of hate and war have we had! I wasn't born a soldier. Once upon a time I lived the decent sort of life a human being ought to live. Before the war with Germany I was a student of philology, and I lived with books—beloved

books, that never betray you. I had lots of them. Three walls of my room were covered with them from floor to ceiling. I would sit in my room of an evening in a deep armchair, the fire burning brightly, the lamp glowing, while outside the St. Petersburg fog flicked a wet paw in the faces of the passers-by, and then, as now, I had a sense of being carefree and independent. And that gave rise to a certain blossoming of the spirit—one could almost hear the rustling of the blossoms—like the flowering of almond-trees in the spring, do you understand?"

"Hm," said Maryutka warily.

"And one fine day all that was exploded, smashed to smithereens. I remember that day as if it were yesterday. I was sitting on the verandah of our country-house reading a book—I remember even that. There was a sinister sunset—deep red, giving everything a blood-like tinge. My father came up from town by train. He was holding a newspaper in his hand and seemed greatly agitated. He pronounced only one word, but there was deadly weight in it. War. A dreadful word, as bloody as the sunset. Then he said, 'Vadim, your father, your grandfather, and your great-grandfather responded to the first call of their country. I hope that you. . . .' His hopes were not in vain. I left my books. I left convinced I was doing the right thing."

"Silly!" exclaimed Maryutka with a shrug of her shoulders. "If my old man bashes his head against the wall when he's drunk, do you think I ought to do the same? I don't see why."

The lieutenant heaved a sigh.

"No, you could hardly be expected to see. You never had to carry the burden of a celebrated lineage, family honour. One's duty—we were very sensitive about that."

"Well, what of it? I loved my father too, but if he was a blooming soak, there's no reason why I should be. You should have sent him packing."

The lieutenant gave a crooked, bitter smile.

. "I didn't send him packing. I packed myself off—to the war. And there, with my own hands, I buried my human heart in that festering dung-heap, that universal grave-yard. Then came the Revolution. I was glad. I put all my hope in it, but it.... Look, not once in all the years I had been an officer in the tsarist army did I lay a finger on a soldier under me. But the Reds caught me in the railway station in Gomel, snatched off my shoulder-straps, and spat in my face. Why?... I managed to escape to the Urals. I still had faith in my country. Once more I set out to fight for her, and for the shoulder-straps that had been so dishonoured. The longer I fought, the clearer it became to me that I no longer had a country. And the shoulder-straps weren't worth fighting for. And I remembered the only thing that was humane and had lasting value. Thought. Ideas. I remembered my books. The only thing I want to do now is to return to them, to bury myself in them, to ask their forgiveness and settle down to live with them."

"So that's it, is it? The world's cracking in two, people are fighting for justice, spilling their blood, and you want to curl up on the sofa and read books?"

"I don't know . . . and don't want to know!" cried out the lieutenant in desperation, leaping to his feet. "The only thing I know is that the world's coming to an end. You were right when you said it was cracking in two. Oh, it's cracking, all right! It's rotten and falling to pieces! It's empty, stripped of its guts! It's dying of emptiness. It used to be young, fertile, unexplored, with the lure of new lands, undiscovered riches. That's all over. There's nothing

new to discover. Nowadays the mind's cunning is all expended on how to save what it has, to drag out existence for another century, another year, another week. Machines. Lifeless mathematics. And thought, made sterile by this mathematics, is concentrated on problems of how to exterminate human beings. The more human beings we exterminate, the fatter our own bellies and pockets will be. To hell with it all! I don't want to hear anybody's views but my own. Enough! I'm out of the running. I don't want to soil my hands any more!"

"Your pretty white hands! Your starched collars! You'll be big-hearted enough to let others dig in the dung for you, eh?"

"Let them, damn it all! Let anyone who has a taste for it. As soon as we're rescued, Maryutka, we'll go to the Caucasus. I've got a little place not far from Sukhumi. That's where we'll go. I'll settle down with my books and let the world go hang. What I want is peace and quiet. I don't want justice. I want peace. And you'll begin to study. You want to study, don't you? You've complained so many times that you had no chance to study. Well, here's your chance. I'll do everything for you. You saved my life and I'll never forget it."

Maryutka sprang to her feet.

"So that's what you want me to do, is it?" She hurled the words at him like nettles. "Lie beside you on a feather-bed while people are sweating out their life's blood for the sake of justice? Fill my belly with chocolates when every chocolate is bought with somebody else's blood? Is that what you want?"

"Come, now, must you be so coarse?" asked the lieutenant with a shudder.

"Coarse? You want everything nice and soft? Just you wait. You stuck your nose up at Bolshevik truth—'Don't want to know anything about it,' you said. Well, you don't know and never did know

anything about it—what it really is and how it's soaked through and through with sweat and tears."

"No, I don't know," said the lieutenant languidly. "But I find it very strange that a girl like you should let herself be so coarse."

Maryutka put her hands on her hips.

"I'm ashamed to have took up with the likes of you!" she burst out. "You worm, you spineless creature! 'Come away, deary, we'll loll on the bed, you and me, and have a nice quiet life!'" she mocked. "Other people are ploughing up the earth with their bare hands to make a new world, while you.... Ugh! you *are* a son of a bitch!"

The colour rushed to the lieutenant's face and his lips formed into a thin line.

"Don't you dare! You're forgetting yourself, you slut!"

Maryutka took one step forward, lifted her hand, and struck the lieutenant full force on his thin unshaved cheek.

He fell back, trembling and clenching his fists.

"Lucky for you you're a woman," he hissed. "I hate you, you cheeky little hussy!"

He stalked off to the shanty.

Maryutka gazed dazedly at her stinging palm, then waved it deprecatingly.

"Ain't he the gentleman! A fish-pox on him!"

CHAPTER 10

In which Lieutenant Govorukha-Otrok hears the roar of the doomed planet, and the author dodges the responsibility of ending the story

For three days Maryutka and the lieutenant did not speak to each other.

But it is hard for two people alone on a desert island to avoid each other.

And then, spring was in the air.

Spring arrived all of a sudden, in a rush of heat. The thin crust of ice covering the island had given way under the blows of spring's little golden hoofs some time before. Now the beach was a soft canary yellow against the thick blue glass of the sea.

At noon the sand was hot to the touch.

The sun rolled up into the sky like a wheel of gold, polished by warm breezes.

The two people on the island were weak from the sun, from the breezes, and from the scurvy that had begun to torture them.

This was no time to quarrel.

From morning to night they would lie in the sand of the beach, their inflamed eyes fixed on the blue glass, searching it for signs of a sail.

"I can't stand it any longer," Maryutka once moaned in desperation. "If the fishermen don't come in three days, I swear I'll put a bullet through my head."

The lieutenant gave a little whistle.

"I thought I was the spineless one. Patience, Maryutka, you'll be a big chief yet. That's all you're good for—to be a chief of a robber band."

"Why do you have to bring it up all over again? Can't you let bygones be bygones? It's true I got angry, but I had good cause to. It hurt to find you were so no-good. Hurt awful. You've wormed yourself into my heart to my own ruin, damn you, you blue-eyed devil!"

The lieutenant burst out laughing, falling on his back in the sand and kicking his feet in the air.

"What's wrong? Are you crazy?" asked Maryutka.

The lieutenant went on laughing.

"Hey, fat-head, can't you answer?"

But the lieutenant did not stop until Maryutka

gave him a punch in the ribs. Then he got up and wiped the tears off his lashes.

"What you roaring at?"

"You're a rare specimen, Maria Filatovna! You'd cheer anybody up. You'd make even the dead dance."

"Why not? Or do you think it's better to go round in circles like a log in a whirlpool, neither coming to one side, nor to the other—making yourself dizzy and other people sick?"

Again the lieutenant burst out laughing, and he slapped Maryutka on the back.

"All glory to you, queen of the Amazons! My good man Friday! You've turned the world upside down for me, Maryutka! You've poured the elixir of life into my veins! I don't want to go whirling round any more like a log in a whirlpool, to borrow your expressive simile. I can see for myself that it's too soon for me to go back to my books. I've got to see some more of life first, got to bare my teeth, got to bite like a wolf so that others will be afraid of my fangs."

"What? Do you really mean you've come to your senses!"

"That I have, dear girl! I've come to my senses! Thanks for teaching me a thing or two. If we bury ourselves in our books at a time like this and let you do what you like with this old earth of ours, there'll be hell to pay. No, my dear little Amazon, it's too soon to—"

He broke off with a gasp.

The ultramarine orbs were fixed on the horizon and flames of joy were dancing in them.

He pointed out to sea and said in a quiet, trembling voice:

"A sail."

Maryutka leaped up as if a spring had been released and stared in the direction of his finger.

She saw a little white spark fluttering, quivering—a sail shaken by the wind.

She pressed her hands to her breast and feasted her eyes on the sight, unable to believe in the reality of this long-awaited moment.

The lieutenant jumped up and down beside her, seized her hands, tore them away from her breast, swung her in circles about him.

He did a dance in the sand, kicking up his thin legs and singing in strident tones:

Whitely gleams a lonely sail
Upon an azure sea. . . .
Tra-la-la! tra-la-la!
Fiddledy, diddledy-dee!

"Stop it, you idiot!" laughed Maryutka happily.

"Maryutka! My darling girl! My queen of the Amazons! We're saved! We're saved!"

"See, you've got the longing to get back to the world of humans, too, haven't you?"

"I have, I have! I just told you so, didn't I?"

"Wait—we've got to let them know; we've got to signal."

"Why? They're headed here."

"What if they turn off to another island! There's millions of them. They may pass us by. Bring a rifle from the shanty."

The lieutenant rushed off. In a minute he came back throwing the rifle into the air and catching it.

"Don't fool with that thing! Fire three shots into the air!" called out Maryutka.

The lieutenant put the butt to his shoulder. Three shots shattered the glassy stillness, and each shot almost felled him. Only then did he realise how weak he had become.

Now the sail was plainly visible. Yellowish-pink, it skimmed over the water like the wing of a bird of good omen.

"What sort of a boat is it?" murmured Maryutka, staring at it intently. "Too big for a fishing smack."

Evidently those in the boat had heard the shots. The sail quivered and veered to the other side, and the boat, heeling well over, made straight for shore.

"Must be a boat belonging to some fishery inspector or other, but why should they be sailing this time of year?" asked Maryutka.

When the boat was about four hundred feet away it turned and a man's form appeared in the bow. Cupping his hands round his mouth, he called to them.

The lieutenant started, strained forward, threw down the rifle, and in two leaps was at the water's edge. He stretched out his arms and shouted in a frenzy of joy:

"Hoo-ray! Our men! Good lads! Hurry up!"

Maryutka peered intently at the boat and saw—gold bars gleaming on the shoulders of the man standing in the bow.

She fluttered like a frightened bird, then stiffened.

Memory flashed a picture before her eyes:

Ice . . . blue water . . . the face of Yevsukov. His words: "If you run foul of the Whites, don't give him up alive."

She gasped, bit her lip, snatched up the rifle.

"Back, you damned White Guard!" she shouted in despair. "Back, I tell you!"

The lieutenant went on waving his arms, standing ankle-deep in the sea.

Suddenly from behind him came the deafening blast of the planet, shattered by fire and storm. Instinctively he leaped aside to escape catastrophe. The blast of the dying world was the last sound his ears ever heard.

Maryutka looked at him.

His head was lying in the water. Red streams from his shattered skull were dissolving in the liquid glass.

She ran forward and knelt beside him. Dropping her rifle, she tore at the collar of her tunic. She tugged at the limp form, tried to lift the mangled head. Suddenly she collapsed on the body.

"Oh, what have I done? Look at me, sweet! Open your dear blue eyes!"

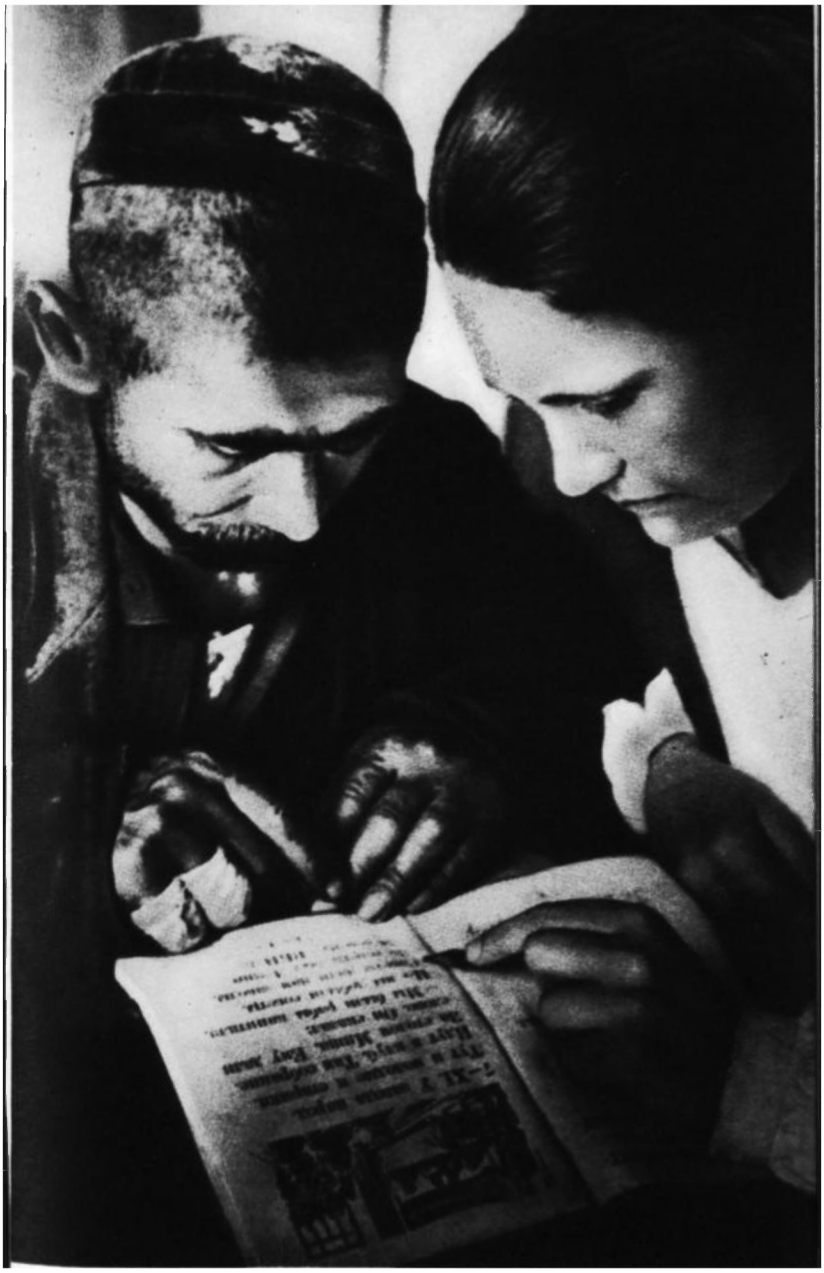
Just then the boat ground up on the sand, and its occupants stared dumbfounded at the girl and the man.

Translated by Margaret Wettlin

An abolition-of-illiteracy circle for adults

Anatoly Lunacharsky and Maxim Gorky

The Decree on Peace, one of the first decrees of the new government, was passed unanimously by the All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers', Peasants' and Soldiers' Deputies on October 26, 1917



№ 208.
Пятница.
27 октября 1917 г.

ИЗВѢСТІЯ

ЦѢНА:
въ Петроградѣ 15 коп.
на ст. жел. д. 18 коп.

Центральнаго Исполнительнаго Комитета
и Петроградскаго Совѣта
РАБОЧИХЪ и СОЛДАТСКИХЪ ДЕПУТАТОВЪ.

Декретъ о мирѣ,

принятый единогласно на засѣданіи Всероссійскаго Съѣзда Совѣтовъ Рабочихъ, Солдатскихъ и Крестьянскихъ Депутатовъ 26 октября 1917 г.

A. ZORICH

A. Zorich is the pseudonym of Vasily Lokot (1899-1957). He belonged to the generation of writers who entered the world of literature in the early years of the revolution. In the twenties and thirties his short stories and satirical articles were published in the columns of the newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, afterwards appearing as books. Many of his stories are about the revolution, the Civil War and about Lenin.

The Insult is based on a dramatic episode in the life of the prominent Russian microbiologist, Academician Daniil Zabolotny.

THE INSULT

The train did not arrive until evening when the huge, dim, long uncleaned windows of the station were draped with a dense, black murk.

The crowd, worn out by the long wait, stormed the narrow gangways leading to the platform. It was the motley, unruly, unforgettable crowd of 1919. The train whistle was to the crowd a trumpet sounding the signal to charge. It surged forward with screams and curses to get to the railway trucks then being used to carry passengers, smashing down platform barriers and partitions that were in its way; above it rose the squeals and howls of women, the crying of frightened children, the creaking of baskets and boxes and the crash of broken glass. In a minute the waiting-room was empty.

The last to reach the platform was an old man in a winter coat with a big old-fashioned shawl collar; he was carrying a large birch-bark box. His face bore some resemblance to Ghe's wonderful portrait of Herzen and attracted immediate attention; he had the beautiful high, clear forehead of the thinker and that concentrated, profound and slightly vacant blance of those who live a particularly intense mental life. The man was a well-known Russian microbiologist, a professor whose brilliant studies of bubonic plague in the East had made his name world famous; he was later awarded the title of Academician, became extremely popular, assumed the post of president of one of the Soviet Union's biggest scientific institutions and was returned to the republic's supreme elected body at every election.

At the time our story opens, however, he was not widely known and, furthermore, it was 1919. Everything was seething and bubbling like water

boiling in a cauldron, nobody had any time for science, and services rendered in the scientist's study were not given much consideration.

In the morning he had tried to get a ticket reservation at the office of the Executive Committee of the little township near which he had been working for three months on an epidemic outbreak and had collected some most valuable material. The Executive Committee, however, had been holding an uninterrupted session for twenty-four hours, and he achieved nothing; they kept him waiting two hours, did nothing for him and, instead of a railway ticket, for some unknown reason pushed into his hand an order enabling him to obtain food at the district food committee. The order was for two Caspian herrings, a box of insecticide, and, additionally, in view of his particular services to science, six bone buttons for underclothes. He grinned when he read it and tried to get to the chairman, but the care-taker at the door said that the meeting was at white heat and he had been ordered not to let "idlers" in. That word cut him to the quick.

He drew himself up with great dignity. "I'm a scientist!"

"There are no scientists any more," said the care-taker firmly. "This isn't the old regime!"

He went to the station and somehow managed to get to the commandant, the man who had replaced the old station-master. The commandant, unshaven, dishevelled, bathed in sweat, nearly out of his mind, his eyes red from lack of sleep, would not even listen to him.

"I can't, comrade, I can't do anything! I'm being torn to pieces! I can't even get a place on a train for the headquarters cook, let alone some professor! Get me? A cook! And I haven't got the dried fish loaded—d'you understand, dried fish? And you're trying to tell me something about microbes. . . ."

That little incident, trivial as it was, immediately upset the professor. He had an honest sense of duty to society, and was profoundly and sincerely pleased over what was happening in the country. But it seemed to him that science, science that was his whole life, science to which he had devoted so many years, so much effort and knowledge, so much of his soul, was doomed in the relentless whirlpool of the revolution. On all sides everything was breaking up, universities were being closed, valuable libraries and laboratories were being destroyed and he thought in alarm that these were not accidental and inevitable episodes of the war, but the beginning of the end, because in this illiterate and barbarian country the people, now that they had taken power into their own hands, would not be capable of appreciating, protecting, or loving science and the people who served it, and all that had been achieved would be abandoned to its fate and hurled back for a hundred years. He examined the situation and it seemed to him that everywhere "consumer ideals", as he defined it mentally, were in the forefront—everywhere something was being shared, distributed, stored up, handed out, and this was all there was in life, while questions of culture were being pushed more and more into the background, and people who had devoted themselves to culture were becoming aliens whom nobody could understand and nobody needed.

This tiny, insignificant incident at the Executive Committee and at the station troubled him because it seemed to confirm his gloomy thoughts and doubts. He was not an ambitious man, nor was he a self-adoring augur like many of the closed caste of professors, and he never sought or demanded honours, recognition or even gratitude. He believed, however, that because of the life he had lived people should now take care of him, protect him, but

instead they had merely pushed at him a couple of rusty salted herrings and six buttons for his underpants, just to be rid of this "idler". He had some sixty years behind him and all of them had been spent in the struggle for the triumph and freedom of the human intellect, and it would seem that his name, his age and his grey hair should demand respect. Yet he had been refused a place in a train, because it was needed for a headquarters cook or for a bundle of dried fish, and had been sent to climb on the buffers with the food "baggers" and black-market traders.... This was undeserved and insulting both to him and the cause he served and, although he realised that it was a small matter, his experience of analysis had taught him that even microscopic drops reflect particles and phenomena characteristic of the whole, and he thought bitterly that such indifference and unconcern was a perfect illustration of what the future held for the nation's science and for himself personally....

He then took his place in the queue, allowed the crowd to surge past, and went on to the platform. The whole train was packed to the limit and, despite the frost, some people were actually clinging to the outside. Late-comers ran along the line of trucks, knocking in vain and asking through closed doors to be let in.

"Headquarters truck!" the people inside shouted, to get rid of the newcomers. "Delegates' truck! Keep going!"

He also tried knocking at the doors, but everywhere people shouted that it was a bath-house, that it was full of typhus patients, or lunatics, that it was a government truck, or that it was for nursing mothers. All of them were overcrowded, everywhere he got curses in answer to his requests and in one place, when he tried to climb on to a brake wagon, an angry woman with a sack gave him such

a shove in the chest that he barely kept his balance, lost his glasses and for a long time fumbled for them blindly on the dirty, frozen ground. To get on the train he would have to use force and that he could not do, did not know how to, he could only plod up and down the train in confusion, the box of specimens held carefully in his hands. It was a heavy box and his shoulders were aching; his fingers had immediately grown stiff in the frost. A snow-storm began and the cold, gusty wind cut through him. It was dark and slippery on the platform and he felt terribly lonely, helpless, miserable and abandoned in that noisy but alien crowd.

"Yes, that's it!" he thought. "Obviously we are becoming superfluous, since they give dried fish preference over the luggage of a scientist. . . ."

The happy-go-lucky, red-headed, high-cheek-boned sailor in a torn fur-trimmed jacket to whom he had given a light in the waiting-room overtook him, dragging a dirty sack over the snow. As he went along the train he banged fiercely at the doors with a copper mug, and when the people inside answered something he shouted at them in a hoarse, piercing voice.

"We're typhus patients, too! We've got babes at the breast, too! Open the doors!"

They bumped into one another. The sailor cursed, wiped the sweat from his face and then, recognising the professor, said, "We'd better beat it towards the tail end, old man! Maybe someone there will take pity on us. The sons of bitches here won't budge. And you try dragging that thing along the ground, you'll wear yourself out running about with it in your arms!"

"I can't drag it on the ground," the professor said gloomily, "it's full of instruments, retorts and other fragile articles."

"That doesn't matter, I've got something pretty fragile myself!" the sailor shouted. "Two bottles of moonshine, and a half bottle of pure spirit the lorry drivers gave me. It's all right! They won't get hurt in the snow!"

Again he banged fiercely at the doors and shouted like a madman.

"We're lunatics, too!" Then he ran on further.

They went back down the whole train once again and at last someone took pity on them and let them into the last truck. It was also overcrowded and on the bunks there was nowhere to sit or even put a bag. On the edge of one bunk lay a bearded, morose-looking soldier as big as the Colossus of Rhodes, his luggage taking a lot of space at the head. The professor asked him to move up a bit, but the soldier only squared his gigantic shoulders, making them broader still.

"We're cramped as it is. Sit on what you're standing on!"

Round a fire that had been kindled on a sheet of iron on the floor of the truck several men were warming their cold hands. A young man in a Caucasian fur cap and sky-blue riding breeches of a very full cut, held up at the waist by a cavalry sword belt, and with an eccentric-looking blouse stitched together out of a piece of church brocade under his sheepskin coat, was sitting cross-legged, oriental fashion, coaxing wheezy notes out of an accordion. He had a cheeky face and clear, blue eyes. He looked round, hearing the conversation.

"Does the gentleman in the fur coat like this song?" he asked and winked at the others.

He ran his fingers over the keys and then sang in a soft voice.

Bumped off by the Cheka
Was he—cuckoo, ha-ha!

They all smiled unfriendly smiles.

"Why d'you let the bourgeois in?" enquired the Colossus of Rhodes.

"Why do you think I'm a bourgeois?" the professor asked gloomily.

"We can see by your glasses," the giant answered unwillingly and turned away.

Bourgeois! The professor recalled how he had spent the last three months of the epidemic, short of food and short of sleep, living in dirty little rooms, feeding on frozen potatoes; in those conditions he had had to work twenty hours a day not sparing his health or considering his old age; how he had risked his life every minute of the day working with microbes and specimens; how much of his strength, how much of his brain and nerves he had given up in order to prevent or lighten the calamity that threatened tens of thousands of people.... That was but one single page from the story of his life, and all the others were the same—full of hard, persistent, conscientious labour. And now he had become an idler, a bourgeois, a parasite with no rights, and they were reminding him of the Cheka and refusing him a tiny place on a bunk....

He drew a deep sigh, again smarting under the insult; then he put the box down and sat down himself on the bare floor, near the door.

He did not want to talk, but the happy-go-lucky sailor squatted down beside him and began to ask him questions; he started talking about spirochetae and sarcinae without any enthusiasm. The sailor immediately grew bored. He listened for a while, yawning, and when the professor spoke about Koch's broth for breeding bacteria he misunderstood him.

"They fed us on broth in the hospitals," he said. "It's no good! Our people need cabbage soup with

meat, then we can do something. And a glass of something strong!"

"That is the ideal of today!" the old professor thought bitterly. "Cabbage soup and meat instead of Koch's broth! After all, can it be otherwise when the country and the people have been held in a state of ignorance, barbarism and poverty for hundreds of years? They've got rid of that now and people's first desire is to be given enough to eat. They want bread and not abstractions! Well, that is as it should be. What objection can be made to that? Why should I be surprised that we and our specimens are pushed into the background, into the third, even into the tenth place, and that people have no respect for science and no interest in it? Where could they suddenly have got it from, that soldier with the beard, or that lad with the accordion, when they've probably never even held an ABC book in their hands? There was Pasteur, for instance, who discovered the law of the propagation of bacteria after devoting ten years of his life to it and was the first to enable science and mankind to find their way in the mysterious world of microfauna. But what does Pasteur mean to them, and how can they appreciate the greatness of his talent when they know nothing of the complicated way matter circulates in the universe and for many centuries have firmly believed that the earth stands on three whales and that rain is sent from heaven by the Prophet Elijah? The great genius Mendeleyev drew up a table of elements that will be used for many generations. But what does this table of elements mean to an illiterate man and how can he express any admiration for it when even ordinary multiplication tables are like Chinese hieroglyphs to him? To love all this, to protect it and carry it on to fresh heights they need the culture that has been created in the course of centuries. But

they have none. Barbarity and ignorance have been encouraged in our country and now everything will be destroyed. Science will be driven into the backyards and we scientists will have to keep out of the way for the remainder of our days. The time will come when this will change, when there will be a renascence, but now if I were to say that the triumph of the mind is loftier and dearer than the triumph of the stomach I would be answered with whistles and called a "bourgeois"; and now, were I to get up and say that it is shameful, that it is an insult to the revolution that I am sitting here on the floor, in the dirt, I, an old man, a professor who has devoted fifty years of his life to science, no one will move a finger to help, no one will stir an inch to make room for me, while the headquarters cook lies with his arms flung out, occupying enough space for three, they would shout me down. "That's how it should be! We want cabbage soup and not Koch's broth—cabbage soup with plenty of meat!"

Again he sighed and closed his eyes wearily. Night had fallen, the first night of the stormy year of 1919. For many years, following an old, sentimental habit, he was accustomed, in the first hours of the new year, to sum up what he had experienced and to think of what was to come. He began to reminisce, and discovered that his past life had followed a pattern that had prevented him from ever doing anything or making any arrangements for himself. Everything had been sacrificed to science, and now science was heading for the abyss and since the entire meaning of his existence had been concentrated in science the future looked empty and cheerless, and the more he thought about it, the heavier his heart grew. . . .

Then he fell off in a doze before he realised it and in this way an hour, or perhaps two, passed.

Suddenly a bright light flashed in his face. He opened his eyes and heard someone whispering hoarsely. "Bandits, anarchists," he heard, and felt that someone was pulling his winter coat off him. Three of them with a lantern and with grenades dangling from their belts stood round him. Their faces looked black in the semi-darkness of the truck and there was a merry, mad and triumphant glint in their eyes.

"What are you doing, gentlemen?" he asked, losing his presence of mind and, still half asleep, using a word that had gone out of use.

"The gentlemen are hanging from the lamp-posts," scoffed a little man with a pock-marked face, who seemed to be the chief. "They send you their regards and say they are lonely without you."

They pulled off his fur coat, then his cap, jacket and shoes; they took away his watch, his wallet and took the wedding ring from his finger. He submitted humbly, he did not resist, only looked from side to side as if inviting the others to take his part and put an end to this new humiliation of his old age and this denigration of human dignity—and denigration of science in his person. But no one moved from his place, they all kept quiet.

"Eh, it's a good coat!" exclaimed the cavalryman in the brocade blouse cheerfully. "The old man's worn it for three hundred years, so now let someone else have a go!"

He cursed with great gusto, and his blue eyes became still clearer and more transparent.

And once more the old professor felt himself an outsider who had been abandoned, and thought that if the cook had been in his place the others would most certainly have taken his part, but to him they were indifferent, he was of no use to anyone in that truck or in life that was leaving him

behind. "Idler!" he recalled, and he winced as he might from physical pain.

Then they asked him to open the box. He did not mind parting with his things, he was in such a mood that he cared nothing for them, and he handed over everything with an air of complete indifference. But in the retorts, jars and notebooks in that box were the results of the tremendous work he had been doing during the epidemic. He knew that it was invaluable to science and would probably have as great an impact as the work of Koch, Lister and Löffler had had in their time. He felt himself trembling with indignation and the fear that in a minute all that would suddenly be crushed to nothing by a single kick from a jackboot. He had given up everything of his own, but he could not surrender that which belonged to science; that would be treachery, treason, and would be an act that he would be ashamed of for the rest of his life. With trembling hands he pulled the box towards himself, he clutched it to his body, protecting it, and thought that come what may, if that was no use to anyone, then he had nothing more to live for....

But they pushed him aside, the pock-marked man grabbed the box and ripped off the lid. For the first time the other people in the truck made some movement; they sat up, hung their heads over the edge of the bunks and looked inquisitively over one another's shoulders—what was in that box that a man would risk his life for it?

"Is that spirit?" asked the pock-marked man snappily, seeing the jars. He took one, opened it, put it to his nose with an expression of lust which turned rapidly to a frown of disgust as he threw the jar on to the floor.

"Bourgeois, what are you trying to fool people for?" he asked sternly.

Then he saw the microscope. It was a delicate, very rare and very expensive instrument that was the pride of the professor's personal laboratory. The pock-marked man looked at it in curiosity and then threw it into his own sack.

They plundered a few of the food-traders and other passengers, the ones that were better dressed, and then left, promising to come again at the next station to see what was in the other jars. By that remark it could be understood that they were travelling by the same train.

When they had gone, nobody spoke for a whole minute.

"I thought he had salt there, or flour," exclaimed the sailor with the high cheek-bones, laughingly, "or perhaps the old man had got his hands on some bacon, I thought. Many people have gone crazy over bacon lately. And all he has is jars and bottles. You're a queer fellow, Excellency! Why d'you risk bullets for the sake of those jars?"

That was the drop that made his cup run over. The cold was coming in from outside and the old professor felt that he was growing stiff, dressed only in a shirt. With his hand he could feel something liquid on the floor that had been spilt there from the broken jar; people were laughing all round him and he was seized by a tormenting, intolerable sadness. Something gave way in his breast, a spasm reached his throat, and suddenly he stood up although he did not yet know what he would do and say. His appearance was such that the passengers in the truck suddenly grew silent and the man with the bag of food sitting next to him pulled at him from behind. "Drop it, you'll only make it worse!" he said in a frightened voice. But he got to his feet, heeding no one, straightened up and was at one and the same time pitiful and ridiculous—in his socks and a waistcoat with the belt torn off the

back—and magnificent under that halo of grey hair and with that expression of righteous anger in his eyes and on his face. He rose, straightened his back and spoke.

It was a strange, muddled speech, but a splendid one, an excited, impassioned speech in which every word he uttered was on fire and urged them on, and made their hearts beat faster, for these words were made warm by profound feelings and were full of proud human indignation. He spoke of the great army of scientists who for decades and centuries had selflessly gathered the grains of knowledge contained in those jars, at which those present had allowed themselves to laugh and which were in reality full of secret, profound and wonderful meaning. He told them about Mechnikov, who had not feared death when he injected typhus into himself in order to test the actions of the bacillus and protect mankind from it, he told them about Archimedes who had risked his head protecting drawings from the enemy that had entered the town, he told them about Galileo who, according to an old legend, had shouted, even in the inquisitors' court, "And still it rotates!", he told them about dozens of people, great and wonderful people, who for the sake of future generations had sacrificed all they had—honour, wealth, life itself. To that strange audience he revealed the most secret depths of man's creative thought, he unfolded before them the intricate, miraculous laws according to which the world lived, and with the enthusiasm, ecstasy and passion of a fanatic unrolled the huge, majestic picture of struggle waged by the man of learning as he boldly tears away one veil after another from the secrets that fill the universe. He recalled with pain, hatred and anguish the chains of slavery that for centuries had fettered the peoples and which the Russian working class had now been the first to

throw off, and with a serene smile he drew them a picture of the fantastic, dizzy and happy future of man when he finally liberates himself from exploitation and ignorance and becomes master over the fabulous riches and potentialities of nature. He spoke about the revolution which alone was capable of raising science to unparalleled heights; he told them how dangerous and how terrible it was that they should scoff, and that the contents of the jars were not dear to anyone or needed by anyone, and he told them about his own life devoted so entirely to the cause of science and now coming to such a hard and unhappy end....

His thoughts seemed disconnected, chaotic, he choked, he spoke almost in a delirium, pouring out in a disorderly stream of fiery words all the pain of the undeserved insults, all the bitterness of doubt; but there was something wonderfully exciting and sincere in that strange speech that rang out in a dirty and cold railway truck in the night that ushered in the rebellious year of 1919.... He saw the people in the truck emerge as out of a fog, saw them come crawling from all corners to surround him in a solid circle, but he could not distinguish faces and could not see their strained attention as they listened with bated breath, striving not to miss one of these words that were for the first time opening up before them a new and magic world; the soldiers listened to him and he was in no state to understand that never before in his life had he had a more receptive, a more ardent and more grateful audience than this.... Then he saw someone's hands stretching out towards him and he was so hopelessly discouraged that he thought perhaps they would hit him or push him, but those hands only threw a greatcoat over his chilled, shivering shoulders; someone else pushed an upturned box towards him for him to sit on, and

someone said hurriedly in a hushed voice. "Felt boots, give him the felt boots. . . ."

He continued talking until the truck gave a sharp jerk and then suddenly stopped. He broke off in the middle of a word, and, enfeebled and exhausted, he sat down and covered his face with his hands. Outside it became noisy, for they were at a station, but inside everybody kept silent for a long time, as though afraid to break the charm of the minutes that had passed. Then the huge bearded soldier who had been lying with his head hanging down from the sleeping shelf began to speak, softly and warmly.

"Don't hold it against us, doctor," he said. He used that word because he called everyone who wore glasses "doctor". "We laughed because we're fools, because we don't understand. Our heads haven't yet got that far, but in our hearts don't we want to reach out for the light? Don't you worry, we shan't go stray! While we are learning sense, our hearts will show us the way. . . ."

The old professor raised his head, amazed at the sudden warmth that sounded in those words, and at the simplicity and strength of the formulation. He raised his head and looked round and saw pale, deeply moved faces, dreamy and delighted smiles on their lips, their eyes wide open and illumined by a wonderful inner light. . . . He saw all that and felt that an enormous burden had fallen from his shoulders, his heart grew calm and he felt serene and happy, as he had felt only in his far-off carefree youth. . . .

The door opened and the little pock-marked man jumped lightly into the truck.

"Here, bourgeois," he said, "open your bottles!"

The professor sat still; not a word was said and nobody moved from his place. The man looked round in astonishment, let out a string of filthy

curses and moved towards the professor's box. But the bearded soldier suddenly snorted terrifyingly, got up, raised himself to his full gigantic height, clenched his huge leg-of-mutton fist and raised it.

"Just you try, I'll wring your neck for you!" he said.

The pock-marked man reached for his holster but, as their eyes met, he hesitated and dropped his hand, looked round at the other faces with a thievish glance, and suddenly ducked his head and darted out of the door quickly and silently.

Four of them went through the town together. People were being shot and undressed in the streets and it was decided that it would be bad for the professor to go alone.

There was a snow-storm. The fierce wind drove low, dark, heavy clouds across the sky; dry, stinging snow dashed at their faces and filled their eyes. In the torn fur-trimmed jacket that the sailor had taken off to put round the professor's shoulders, and in the huge felt boots the Colossus of Rhodes had given him, in the cavalryman's shaggy fur cap, the professor did not notice the cold, or anything else around him, feeling only that he wanted to laugh loudly and for no apparent reason, as one laughs at the age of seventeen. As he walked along he thought that things would turn out all right, that everything would be fine since so much that was youthful, such passionate thirst for creative activity and faith in the future were reflected in the enthusiastic smiles and bright eyes that he had seen in the railway truck. He also reflected that if all the country's universities collapsed and everything accumulated in a hundred years turned to dust, it still would not matter as long as there was so much potential strength and so much sound instinct in the victorious class; he realised that he was not superfluous, that life and work was only now begin-

ning, for now the science that had always been the privilege of individuals would become the occupation of thousands of new people in whose eyes shone the light of the dreamer. He thought over the insults that had tormented him on that day, and it all seemed petty and sordid, and he was ashamed of himself....

The sailor with the high cheek-bones, wearing only a torn uniform tunic, shivered from the cold and cursed the pock-marked bandit savagely.

"Characters like him..." he began, jumping up and down and blowing on his fingers to get warm, "are an ulcer on the body of the world revolution. A snotty-nosed, snivelling anarchist! I asked him who he thought he was—smashing scientific bottles like that. He said he was a commissar. I know the sort—under the order of May 42nd, appointed to take charge of pickpockets...."

The bearded soldier marched along in silence and in places where the ground was slippery he held the professor under the elbow to support him; he spoke occasionally, and it was with pretended severity, like a nurse talking to a child.

"Steady, steady, you'll slip! Good Lord, you're a caution, you are...."

Behind them the blue-eyed cavalryman carried the box of specimens; he was bare-headed, his hair was tousled and snow-flakes sparkled and thawed in it. Every minute he brushed the snow off the lid of the box.

"Just a minute, friends," he said at last, in a worried voice. "Just a minute and I'll take off this surplice I'm wearing—those bugs of his may catch cold, you know...."

He took off the brocade blouse and carefully wrapped the box in it and then tied a long dirty scarf round it so that it would be warmer.

"My friends," was all the professor could say;

he was deeply touched and felt something rise to his throat. "My dear friends. . . ."

They reached the professor's house and he invited them all in to warm themselves. Two of them went in, but the bearded soldier stamped around in the entrance hall, and carefully wiped the snow off the box with the skirt of his greatcoat.

"I'll go back to the station for that telescope of his," he snorted. "I noticed which truck they were in. They robbed him, the idiots, but how can he find out what's what without that thingummy of his? That's no way. I'll take 'em to pieces, bone by bone, the thugs. I'm a quiet sort of fellow, you know, but when I'm roused it's better to keep out of my way. That's when I tear oak-trees up by the roots."

"So you're roused now, are you?" asked the blue-eyed cavalryman with some curiosity.

"Yes, I'm as mad as hell," confirmed the giant.

Nobody heard and nobody knows what the professor talked about to his strange guests on that remarkable night of the new year, but when they left him several hours later and shook hands with him respectfully at the threshold of his house, some unusual and very deep feeling was imprinted on their faces; it was the impress of a great, new idea they had thought of for the first time, and they looked like men who had reached an unexpected and important decision. . . .

Some ten years later the professor died and at his funeral two of the men, who carried his coffin through the streets to the mournful strains of Chopin's Funeral March, were his two immediate assistants and personal friends.

On the left was the blue-eyed cavalryman; he was still the same, just a slight touch of silver at the temples and the first wrinkles on his forehead. He had been recalled from Europe by telegram; he

had read a paper at a world congress of biologists as a representative of the Soviet Union and his paper was unanimously acknowledged one of the most interesting in recent years.

On the right was the sailor with high cheekbones; he was now the director of an important research institute in the Ukraine.

Only the morose bearded soldier was missing. He had been killed at the railway station on that memorable night, and was found next morning under an embankment; he lay with his two huge, dirty hands pressing the microscope he had recovered to his heart, as if it were something he dearly loved....

Translated by George H. Hanna

KORNEI CHUKOVSKY

The *Collected Works* of Kornei Chukovsky (b. 1882), Lenin Prize winner, include the most varied types of writing—stories and verses for children, a book about children, *From Two to Five*, scholarly study of Nekrasov's poetry, and brilliant pen portraits of writers, musicians and artists.

Such prominent figures as Blok, Bryusov, Repin, Gorky, Mayakovsky are described in his book *Contemporaries*, from which the following story, about Lunacharsky, is taken.

PEOPLE'S COMMISSAR FOR EDUCATION

I

A scrap of paper, hurriedly affixed by a single drawing-pin, hung on the door.

People's Commissar for Education
A. V. LUNACHARSKY
receives visitors on Saturdays only
from 2 to 6

But you could see at once that it was not to be taken too seriously; it was hanging there crookedly, without any attempt at official formality, and nobody took any notice of it. People went in whenever they wanted to.

Anatoly Vasilyevich—all Petrograd knew Lunacharsky as Anatoly Vasilyevich—was living in Manezhny Street, near Liteiny, in a small, rather ugly apartment that was every day besieged by dozens of people who sought his advice and help.

Teachers, workers, inventors, librarians, circus people, futurists, painters of all trends and genres (from the members of the old Peripatetic Group to Cubists), philosophers, ballet dancers, hypnotists, singers, poets from the Proletcult movement, and people who were just poets, actors from the former imperial theatre—all of them came in an endless procession to Anatoly Vasilyevich up a filthy staircase to the second floor to crowd into a small room that in the end began to be called the "reception-room".

That was in 1918. Soon the paper on the door was replaced by another that looked very impressive.

People's Commissar for Education
A. V. LUNACHARSKY
Receives visitors at the Winter Palace
(on certain days)
and at the Commissariat of Education
(on certain days)
NO VISITORS RECEIVED HERE

Even that did not frighten anyone; by nine in the morning the reception-room was crowded. People sat on the scraggy couch, on the window-sills and on stools brought from the kitchen.

Among the many visitors there were some I remember particularly well.

Vsevolod Meyerhold, still youthful-looking, unshaven, excited, impetuous as if he had just burst out of the turmoil of some wild enterprise;

Vladimir Bekhterev, the famous psychiatrist, sleepy, bearded and flabby, with a heavy peasant face;

Nappelbaum, the photographer, garrulous, sociable, in an artist's loose velvet blouse;

Mikhail Nikolayevich, the son of Chernyshevsky, taciturn, thickset, with his plump hand tenderly stroking some heavy bright-red books, the writings of his great father, which he has come to talk to the People's Commissar about;

Academician Oldenburg, very small, unimposing and vivacious as a small boy, in a short student-type jacket;

Ieronim Ieronimych Yasinsky, the novelist, a picturesque, grey-headed, impressively fine-featured old man with magnificent, thick eyebrows and tiny, cunning, oily little eyes;

Yuri Annenkov, the artist (known to all as Yurochka), omnipresent, sprightly and talented;

Alexander Kugel, connoisseur and fanatic of the theatre, the former king of the critics, witty, curly-headed, untidy, with an unkind and ironical smile in his tired, aggrieved eyes.

They all went to him, to Anatoly Vasilyevich, for advice and help, and he sat there alone in a tiny little room and greeted everyone with such eager and lively interest, as though he had long been thinking of nothing else but an opportunity to meet this man, to discuss things and, if necessary, argue with him.

He began arguing with me almost as soon as I opened my mouth.

"You're making a great mistake," he said. "All the time you praise that Whitman of yours because he's supposed to be the poet of democracy.* What is democracy? Philistinism, a cunning screen to deceive the working people! A republic of petty property owners! No, Whitman. . . ."

He jumped up like a young man and, striding up and down the room, began to outline his ideas on the American "bard of democracy". His rapid and confident speech ran on without any hesitation or pauses, he improvised with the brilliance of an artist, easily and freely, and soon he would begin using such expressions as "the illumination of the spirit", "architecture of the universe", "the merging of human wills". But even this extravagant speech suited Anatoly Vasilyevich, his melodious voice and his whole poetic, elegant appearance. Without any effort of memory he quoted poetry, not only that of Walt Whitman, but also Verhaeren, Tyutchev and Jules Romains. He knew a lot of poetry, in three or four languages, and enjoyed reciting it, also in a somewhat theatrical manner.

His voice grew louder and louder. It was as if he were making a speech from a platform to a big crowd and I began to feel uncomfortable at the idea that such eloquence should be expended on me alone.

* Shortly before this I had published a book on the great American poet, Walt Whitman.

Nevertheless I found it impossible to accept completely the interpretation of Walt Whitman's poetry that Lunacharsky offered me. I felt embarrassed as I told him so, and I remember that I was very pleased that he listened to my objections patiently, with respect and without the slightest arrogance. My objections were clumsy and incoherent but with great kindness he analysed my idea and even helped me formulate it as precisely as possible in order immediately to oppose it.

Then suddenly he realised that it was getting late and there were still many people in the reception-room. He opened the door and invited Meyerhold into his study; with Meyerhold he would argue for hours on end, sometimes until late at night, with a few pauses in between.

It was decided that I should come to him again in a few days to finish our argument. The end of it was that I asked Anatoly Vasilyevich to write at least a brief article for the new edition of my book on Whitman. He willingly agreed, without any ministerial provisos; he did not object to an entirely different interpretation of the American poet's work rubbing shoulders with his own.

"The article will be ready the day after tomorrow." He looked at his watch. "The day after tomorrow . . . at about four o'clock."

I knew that he often worked twenty hours a day, sometimes forgetting his meals and going short of sleep for weeks on end. Conferences, visitors, lectures, speeches at meetings (not only in Petrograd but also in Kronstadt, Sestroretsk and, I think, somewhere else) took up all his time. When I went to him at the appointed hour I was sure the article would not be ready. But I heard a typewriter rattling away behind the closed door of his study and by the already familiar words that reached my ears ("illumination of the spirit", "architecture of the

universe", "an unusual note in a single symphony") I realised that Anatoly Vasilyevich was dictating just that article. He dictated without stopping and at a speed that aroused professional jealousy in me.

The article would have been finished in time but for the people who kept coming into the room.

He listened attentively to everyone and if he believed the visitor was making a sensible suggestion, the typist had each time to remove the unfinished Whitman article and at lightning speed type out Anatoly Vasilyevich's administrative instructions, directions, orders and requests, which he signed on the spot, without further thought. But no sooner had the flood of visitors begun to abate than the typist replaced the page of the article and Anatoly Vasilyevich continued dictating from the word he had left off at, in the same rhythm and with the same intonation.

The typist complained that lately he had been writing for the press only in this way—with interruptions during which big theoretical, ideological themes were squeezed out by petty everyday affairs.

I could see, however, that this was no burden to him. The unusual aspect of his work at that time (Petrograd, 1918) was that, while tackling extensive problems on a national and even a world scale, he had to deal with countless petty problems such as procuring frozen cranberries for an aged actresses' home or finding footcloths for the children's home at Okhta.

The cold and hungry life of a country ruined by war demanded of Anatoly Vasilyevich that he constantly combine the great and the small, and since in all his cares and worries, even in the most microscopic of them, he had before him one grand purpose—to consolidate the gains of October, to assist in one way or another the birth and growth of the new, still unknown, Soviet culture—he will-

ingly devoted his efforts to the petty things of every day and regarded it as service to the same noble cause.

I still have a few notes from Anatoly Vasilyevich that belong to that time. Every one of them is devoted to those "petty affairs" which, despite their pettiness, had to serve (and did serve!) the huge task of building Soviet culture.

Here is one of them that is extremely typical. On the left-hand side of the paper these weighty words are printed in a single column.

Russian Federative Soviet Republic

People's Commissariat of the
Properties of the Republic

Petersburg Division

July 12, 1918
No. 1501

Petersburg
Winter Palace

Under these words there is a rubber stamp—Russian Republic. Workers' and Peasants' Government. Commissariat for Education. Department of Art.

On the right the following was written:

To Comrade Kornei Ivanovich Chukovsky.
Dear Comrade,

I beg you, as one well acquainted with Comrade Puni's children's tales, to give me in writing your competent opinion of whether the material is suitable for the state publishing house.

A. Lunacharsky
People's Commissar.

People who have no conception of that remarkable period may perhaps wonder whether it was fitting for one of the leaders at the formidable

headquarters of the revolution to take an interest in some children's tales written by an unknown youth. As can be seen from the text of the note, Anatoly Vasilyevich was here also attentive to a minor matter for the sake of the fulfilment of great tasks. If one looks more deeply into this hurried note one finds expressed there his earnest solicitude for two important instruments of the future Soviet culture; the first of them was the State Publishing House, which at that time was still embryonic and did not see the light of day for another year, and the second was literature for Soviet children, at that time also still unborn.*

Today, when our state publishing houses have thousands of first-class, often classic, books to their credit in all branches of technology, science and art, and our children's literature has long since become a kingdom that has won for itself world recognition, one cannot help being moved by this paper, yellowed with age, that tells of the time when one of these giant publishing houses, *Gosizdat*, was nothing but a scarcely discernible speck that the first People's Commissar for Education had to nurse in every way, and *Detgiz*, the Children's Publishing House, had not yet been thought of.

By the way, apart from the needs of the state, Anatoly Vasilyevich, an artist by nature, could easily be carried away, for no selfish reason, by a fairy-tale, a song, a drama or a jolly nursery rhyme. He welcomed every modest study by a painter, every poem, every piece of music, provided they showed talent, warmly and enthusiastically, with sincere gratitude to the author. I watched him listening to Blok when the poet recited his poem

* The decision of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee on "The State Publishing House" was passed on May 19, 1919.

Retribution, I saw how he listened to Mayakovsky and to a playwright I did not know who had written an historical play in verse. Only poets can listen to a poet in the way he listened. I loved to watch him at such moments. Even the turn of his head, the way he suddenly became youthful, straightened his rounded shoulders, nervously twisted the edges of his jacket with his thin fingers and gazed fondly at the person who was reciting bespoke the artist in him.

Of all forms of art Lunacharsky preferred the theatre; he liked it more than painting, more than music and more than poetry. He was never indifferent in the theatre, he would be overjoyed or indignant, or wildly happy and, no matter how busy he was, he would always see any show, even a poor one, through to the end.

When the famous musical comedy artist Monakhov, influenced by Gorky, Andreyeva and Blok, took up dramatic roles and played King Philip in Schiller's *Don Carlos* (in Petrograd in 1919) with fine psychological insight, Lunacharsky hurried to him behind the scenes before he had had time to remove his make-up and kissed him on his painted cheek. Monakhov, usually cold and reserved, was greatly embarrassed and touched by the impulsive greeting of the People's Commissar.

If one needs a more expressive and colourful example of the expansive Anatoly Vasilyevich's youthful enthusiasm for the theatre one has only to read his note to the dying Vakhtangov, written under the impression of the first production of *Princess Turandot* by that great master of stage art.

Dear, dear Yevgeny Bagrationovich,

I have a very strange feeling at the moment. You have filled my heart with such a cloudless, light-winged, melodious festival ... and at the same

time I learn that you are ill. Get well, dear, rich talent. Your gifts are so varied, so poetic, so profound that we all love you, are all proud of you. All your productions that I have seen are exciting and promise much. Give me time to think a little. I do not want to write about you in a hurry. But I shall write "Vakhtangov". Not just a sketch, of course, but an impression of everything you have given me by giving it to the public. Get well. All the best. Congratulations on your success. I expect big and exceptional things of you.

Yours,

Lunacharsky.

To write such youthfully ardent letters to someone connected with the stage, one has to be utterly devoted to the theatre.

II

Lunacharsky believed that his position as a representative of state power demanded that he show a sympathetic, active and tender love for people engaged in the arts, for those who think creatively. He expressed this idea very clearly in an article in memory of Vladimir Mayakovsky. Speaking of the death of the poet, he made the following admission. "We are not all like Marx, who said that poets need many caresses. Not all of us understand this, just as not all of us understood that Mayakovsky needed countless caresses."

He gave Mayakovsky his "caresses" almost from the first October days; he was his herald, his defender, his interpreter and his friend. I often saw them together in 1918. Some people might have thought, superficially, that Mayakovsky needed no "caresses"; he displayed a youthful impudence, was very independent and it required the sensitivity of

Lunacharsky to realise that behind all that bravado there was "a great hunger for tenderness and love, a great hunger for exceedingly intimate sympathy ... a desire to be understood and at times to be comforted, caressed". "Under that coating of metal, in which a whole world was reflected," said Lunacharsky, "there beat a heart that was not only burning, not only tender, but also fragile and easily wounded."

Lunacharsky performed a great service in protecting, as far as lay within his power, that "fragile" and easily wounded heart for Soviet culture.

The relations between the poet and the People's Commissar were free, frank, principled and straightforward and seemed to preclude any tenderness whatsoever (on either side). Mayakovsky, for instance, never concealed from Anatoly Vasilyevich that, although he had a high opinion of him as a brilliant critic, his opinion of his dramas and verse was very low. Somewhat later he stated this opinion of his publicly. In the Moscow House of the Press in 1920 there was a debate on these works of Lunacharsky with Kerzhentsev in the chair; the debate developed into a merciless feast of criticism. Those who spoke, Mayakovsky included, with great solidarity, one after another, condemned and reviled his plays for four solid hours on end.

Anatoly Vasilyevich "sat on the stage and for four hours listened to absolutely destructive criticisms directed against his plays..." Mikhail Koltsov recalled some years later. "Lunacharsky listened to it all in silence and it was difficult to imagine what he could put up against that Mont Blanc of accusations. It was about midnight when ... Anatoly Vasilyevich took the floor. And what happened? He spoke for two and a half hours and nobody left the hall, nobody even moved. In a most amazing speech he defended his plays and routed his

opponents, each of them individually and all of them collectively.

"It ended with the entire audience, including Lunacharsky's bitterest opponents, giving him a triumphal ovation at about three o'clock in the morning such as the House of the Press had never before seen."

I was not present at that memorable debate, but I cannot forget how, full of admiration, Mayakovsky told me about it in Petrograd while still under the fresh impression.

"Lunacharsky spoke like a god." Those were Mayakovsky's actual words. "That night Lunacharsky was a genius."

After that night's debate Lunacharsky went out into the street with Mikhail Koltsov.

"I was interested to know," Koltsov recalled, "what he had got out of that fatiguing battle. But the only thing he said was, 'Did you notice that Mayakovsky looks sad? Do you happen to know what's wrong with him?...' Then he added in a worried voice, 'I'll have to go and see him, and cheer him up a bit.' " Mayakovsky, incidentally, carried away by the polemics, had made a particularly sharp attack on Lunacharsky's plays.

What I have just been describing took place later, when Anatoly Vasilyevich had moved to Moscow, but in 1918 in Petrograd I heard him speak in public only three or four times, no more, but even that was enough to understand and to feel his tremendous talent as propagandist, orator and master of improvised, spontaneous speech. All the speeches of his that I heard (in Petrograd and, later, in Moscow) were spontaneous in the fullest sense of the word. I remember that early in the spring of 1918 he intended going to the Petrograd District to see Gorky.

"To Kronverksky Street!" he said to the driver.

Gorky lived in Kronverksky Street and at that time Anatoly Vasilyevich went to see him very frequently, sometimes he was there several days running. While he was in the car he took some papers out of his brief-case and began reading them carefully but with the speed that was typical of him, in preparation for his conference with Gorky.

We did not get as far as Kronverksky, however, and had to make a halt. At that time motor cars were a great rarity in the city; many people recognised Anatoly Vasiliyevich's car and, knowing his usual route, intercepted him on the way. This time some Baltic sailors, armed from head to foot, came up to him with their independent air of being masters of the land; one of them bore an astonishing resemblance to Yesenin. They spoke for some five minutes with the People's Commissar about some trouble in the Peter and Paul Fortress and made him promise to come there the same day. Then the car was stopped by some elderly workers of the Petersburg type I had known as a boy—gaunt, staid, taciturn, strict—who invited him to the opening of the Printers' Club, in Sadovaya Street, if I am not mistaken; he glanced at his notebook and said he would certainly be present.

I remember that it was then that I first noticed what I later (especially in Moscow) noticed many more times; this connoisseur of Botticelli, this fine judge of Richard Wagner, this interpreter of Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Marcel Proust and Pirandello was perfectly at home among rank-and-file proletarians; these were really *his own* people and all his work and all his knowledge were devoted *to them.*

Translated by George H. Hanna

KONSTANTIN FEDIN

In the autumn of 1919, a young soldier, still in his army greatcoat, came to revolutionary Petrograd; this was Fedin (born 1892), the future author of *Towns and Years*, *Early Joys*, *No Ordinary Summer* and other novels widely known in many countries.

He was mobilised for the Red Army immediately on arrival and worked on its newspapers up to the end of the Civil War. The abundance of impressions he gained fed a long-standing urge to write. And Fedin wrote a lot. He made the acquaintance of Gorky and the latter became the first judge of Fedin's stories. In the following extracts from *Gorky Among Us* Fedin tells us of his meetings with Gorky during the early years of the revolution.

"His role in shaping the newborn Soviet literature of the twenties," wrote Fedin, "was a tremendous one and his interest in the fate of a writer often determined the entire further development of a talented person and brightened the path of many a young writer."

> But no! That was reality; it was more than reality—it was reality and reminiscence.
>
> *Leo Tolstoy*

In the autumn of 1919, when I was demobilised and reached Petrograd, the city was an armed camp. It was, in fact, called the "Petrograd Fortified Area" and the headquarters of the area was in the heart of the city, in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Yudenich's Whiteguards had reached its outskirts. His officers could see the Moscow Toll-gate through field-glasses from the Pulkovo Heights. They intended either taking the city by storm or besieging it.

Then the Petrograd workers and the Red Army made an effort that many people regarded as impossible—they checked the enemy's advance, and hurled him back. Yudenich's army was routed and disgraced.

Every street, every house, every stone of Petrograd bore traces of that heroic effort for a long time.

The population of the city was only a third of what it had been in peacetime. The people were suffering from hunger, from typhus and from the cold; they were tormented by thousands of petty privations and illnesses whose very existence they had never even suspected in peacetime....

But that hungry, icy fort was kept alive by undying faith in its new, fantastic morrow....

Like everyone else around me, I had to struggle for physical survival. Never once, however, did I forget literature. I was completely alone in that huge city, in yesterday's capital, which never suspected that yet another young man had appeared

on its wide avenues who also dreamed of the writing profession and hoped to make some conquests and, perhaps, gain fame.

I had an insatiable urge to *understand everything* and was certain that nothing could satisfy that urge better than literature. The strongest feeling that I brought to the revolution after what I had experienced as a prisoner of war, was the feeling of Russia as my homeland. That feeling was not driven away by the revolution; it merged with it....

Many people thought as I did and—I am sure of this—many expected a weighty word from literature.

In that heroic, hungry, epidemic-ridden and silent Petrograd there was one man who seemed to stand aloof from the rest, but who in reality was the focal point of a movement that was just beginning to grow. The man was Gorky. And the movement was the beginning of the Soviet work of the intelligentsia.

Gorky played the call to muster on his magic flute, and gradually people began to take courage and to peep out of their holes and caves. There was something medieval in the way the dead guilds reappeared in the light of day; writers came out and warmed up their frozen ink, scientists appeared and took their places at their laboratory benches. Gorky had many ways of bringing influence to bear. The chief of them was his personality. No sensible person, of course, doubted the purity of Gorky's motives; purity of motives, however, was no rarity among the intelligentsia. Gorky had one advantage over all the intellectuals—his life had been woven into the history of the revolution and belonged to it. He was the biography of his times. It was, therefore, natural that in the revolution he should be on the right side of the barricades and

that his appeals should contain no suggestion of fortuitousness or calculation. And his earlier fame, his influence in art and, therefore, his power over the intellect were so great that he had no need to multiply them.

The sarcastically inclined may say that Gorky's magic flute was the bread ration. But everybody could see that there was no hidden strategy in this—it was just another thing that Gorky did for culture. He was part of that culture and he could not have had any other idea than the one he had—to compel that culture to live.

Gorky was writing beside a broad window looking out on to Kronverksky Street. I could see his silhouette bent over a big desk where everything was in such apple-pie order that it looked empty. His glasses glinted in the sun as he looked over the top of them, noticed me and took them off. He walked easily towards me, one shoulder lowered and jutting angularly, took me by the elbow and propelled me towards another small desk.

"Here, if you please!"

He slapped a pile of books with his hand, then began opening them at the title page, one by one, and, with his head tilted slightly backwards, tapped the names of the authors with his finger-nail.

"Very clever, very..." he kept repeating. "But ironical, it's all tongue-in-cheek, and often without reason. This one is a light-weight, but he is knowledgeable, gives a lot of facts.... No sense at all in his arguments.... Don't be tempted.... This one is so witty and brilliant it would be more suited to a Frenchman. He is consistent, however; despite his German origin he has no system at all, and is a cynic....

"That is all I've so far managed to dig out on the 1848 revolution. There was an excellent book,

but it got lost. I can't find it anywhere. There are all kinds of scamps who steal books from my shelves, you know. I ought to lock them up, I suppose."

The bookshelves were arranged like those of a public library, end-on to the wall; there were only narrow gangways between them, but in this big room the sunshine found its way even into those narrow spaces.

Gorky tore himself away from the books with a faint smile.

"Don't restrict yourself in any way," he rumbled in his low bass. "Make use of the biggest stage. You can have the circus if you want it. Or a city square with hundreds and thousands of actors. Would you like to use the church steps, for instance?... That could make a glorious spectacle...."

Back he went to his desk in a cloud of tobacco smoke. He ran his fingers over the few things on it, as though making sure they were all there—blue pencil, ashtray, glasses, sheets of lined paper.

"I have more and more contact with our scientists," he told me. "Extraordinary people! They sit in their studies, their hands in home-made gloves, their feet wrapped in blankets, and write. Just as if the sergeant of the guard might arrive at any moment to check up whether they were at their posts.... They wander over pathless mountains in the Urals and gather fantastic collections of precious stones for the Academy of Sciences. They don't see a scrap of bread for months on end. One wonders what they live on—must live by hunting, like savages! This isn't California at the time of the gold rush, you know. Money doesn't interest them, they're not filling their own coffers. They're people we should be proud of....

"We have to save Russian science.... We need food, even at the highest price—food!

"This never happened to me in the past, you know—pains in the heart and swollen legs. Not enough phosphorus. No sugar. . . ."

He stopped suddenly (talking about himself again!).

"The nervous strain of our work makes phosphorus essential," he informed me didactically.

"My last visitor before you was Professor Fersman," he said in a more lively voice. "He had just spoken to Lenin over the direct line to Moscow about the work of the commission set up to improve scientists' conditions. Lenin was very sympathetic and was ready to help. Fersman assured me that Lenin is all for the intelligentsia. . . ."

Again I see him when he is talking about Lenin. With just a touch of miming, a jerking of the shoulders he reproduces a Gorky-Lenin conversation with affectionate humour.

"This is not the first year I've been arguing that short-sighted people will regret their neglect of the intelligentsia. We'll have to go begging to those same academicians and professors. It has become obvious that we cannot do anything without the intelligentsia. . . . And then what? That, of course, made the educated gentlemen gloat. And that is no good, either. No good at all. . . ."

I wanted to tie up the books he had selected for me.

"Give them to me, give them to me," he demanded, "I have a lot of experience as a packer."

"So have I."

"Let's see who's best!"

With experienced hands he straightened out a sheet of blue sugar-wrapping, straightened up the pile of books and put them on the paper, grasped the paper firmly in his hands and folded it over, twisted a piece of string round his index finger and, hugging the parcel close to him, passed the string

tightly round it in two directions. He then made a loop over his left hand with the string, with a jerk snapped it skilfully and fastened the end at the place where the strings crossed. He brought the parcel to me, clicked his heels and smiled.

"If you please, sir!... Who's better?"

"I could do it just as well...."

"We'll see about that another time...."

Like a fresh initiate I carried his parting words away with me. I kept a firm hold on the packet of books in which my future was perhaps hidden—precepts for work, the secrets of art, the truth of life—who could know?

In the summer I saw Lenin and Gorky together.

It was in July at the opening of the Second Congress of the Communist International. The fact that Lenin had come for the Congress and had spoken in a city that had shortly before with great sacrifices defended its walls against the enemy, and that representatives of workers' parties from almost all parts of the world had gathered here—all this gave the occasion a triumphal air. There were, however, in this triumph certain harsh and relentless notes—the struggle, the life-and-death struggle, was still going on and the Congress was conducted with clenched teeth, with a determination to fight to the end.

Lenin's arrival in the hall was striking.

The dull yellow light from the chandeliers, made even duller by the strong light of day that came in through the skylight, seemed to increase the excitement in the packed hall. The air in the palace had become oppressive long before the Congress opened. And suddenly the tension created by this strange combination of electric light and sunlight, and by the stuffiness, and the long waiting broke out in applause that began in bursts in the musi-

cians' gallery, then merged into one and began to spread slowly downwards until it embraced the whole palace and seemed actually to rock it; Lenin, his head bent forward, as though he were cutting his way through an opposing air stream, strode through the entire hall at the head of a crowd of delegates. He made his way quickly to the place allotted to the presidium and disappeared from view while the ovation grew in volume. Then he suddenly appeared again and ran lightly up the gangway of the amphitheatre. He was seen and people began to move towards the place where he had stopped; the ring tightened round him, and the thunder of applause again rocked the hall. Lenin was engaged in friendly conversation with Mikha Tskhakaya, and kept bending closer to his ear until, finally, he gave what seemed to be an angry wave of the hand at the lack of order, almost had to force his way through the ring of people and hurried down the gangway.

He had to endure a third ovation when he took the floor to make his report. He stood for a long time on the rostrum looking through some papers. Then he raised his arm high and waved his hand to quieten an audience that refused to be silenced. Alone amidst that rumbling noise he suddenly pulled his watch out of his waistcoat pocket, as if defending himself, showed it to the crowd and tapped angrily on the glass—but nothing helped. Then he again began nervously turning over his papers, as though he were quite unable to reconcile himself to the unfortunate breach of good order.

Lenin's very first words brought him into living contact with his audience. He did not speak very loudly, but in a high-pitched voice with a slightly guttural "r"; he spoke of matter-of-fact, prosaic things, but he spoke with unusual inspiration, the inspiration of the true orator. He read out lists of

figures, holding his notes close to his eyes to do so; everything in his words was clear and practical, with no ornaments or embellishments, but his speech, taken together with his simple, persuasive gestures and with the mobility and lightness of his whole body, seemed to burn with an inward fire.

Lenin's speech revealed a big world, the world of struggle for mankind waged by the first Soviet state on earth. He seemed to take history by the hand and lead her easily into the hall, while she obediently unfolded before our eyes the deeds of recently defeated Poland and routed Wrangel, and the deeds of their defender, Britain, who had suddenly become imbued with love of peace and had proposed to mediate between the Soviets and the counter-revolution. Lenin recorded only a moment in history, but his practical words resembled the calculations of a scientist, and in them there was the dream of a new world that throbbed like the beating of a heart; the Congress delegates not only followed the dynamics of Lenin's thoughts but seemed to reach out and place their hands on Lenin's heart.

The press-box where I was sitting was next to the rostrum. I did not take my eyes off Lenin and I got the impression that, had I been an artist, I could have drawn his portrait from memory.

I saw him again at the end of the session when he was going towards the exit in the midst of a crowd of delegates. There was a terrible crush, and in that stuffy atmosphere and the milling crowd hundreds of people were trying to push their way forward to see him closer at hand, and all the time he was moving through the corridors, in the circular hall and in the lobby, he was hemmed in by the crowd.

Suddenly I saw Gorky's head, high above Lenin and high above the crowd. The whole crowd came

to a halt at the doors, and then began slowly trickling out through the exit. That was how Lenin and Gorky left the palace, pressed together by the crowd, hand in hand, but outside, on the porch, the crowd again halted and they were surrounded by jostling photographers with their cameras clicking, and their heads hidden under black cloths or kerchiefs. Gorky stood bareheaded beside a column behind Lenin and his head, lit up by the sun, was visible from afar and his name was being mentioned all round me. I saw something new in Gorky's face, something I could not remember having seen at our previous meetings. He was, no doubt, profoundly moved and was struggling to overcome his agitation; this made his glance harsh and the usually mobile folds in his cheeks had become rigid. He seemed to me to have a masterful look about him, his whole appearance, as it were, expressing the profound determination that had just emanated from Lenin's speech and inspired the whole Congress.

Jostled by the crowd and watching them over the heads and shoulders of others, I did my best to catch every movement made by those two men standing together—Lenin and Gorky. It struck me that the best I had ever thought of Gorky was embodied in him at that moment, in his closeness to Lenin, his closeness to the higher comprehension of everything that had been going on in the world.

I went to him thinking, as usual, of nothing but the coming meeting and did not notice that there was somebody else in the room, probably hidden between the bookshelves. During our talk he took me by the hand and turned me lightly round.

"Meet Vsevolod Ivanov. Also a writer. From Siberia. Hm-m."

A man in a shabby semi-military jacket, his legs

bound in puttees, was standing with his back to the stove. This outfit, all too common in those days, had long since acquired the torn and faded look that comes from lengthy campaigning. His face and hands were of an ashen hue; he was gaunt, almost haggard, you could see he had done plenty of journeying on foot and on the whole he looked like a runaway.

"It's terrible what he's been telling me," said Gorky with a sigh.

That was true, he was telling a story of horrors. He had just arrived, probably on foot, from the East and visions of the Kolchak regime were still in his narrow eyes behind the tiny lenses of a pince-nez that did not suit his broad face. He had been in the holocaust of the Civil War for two years and had come out of it unscathed, if that was at all possible. He spoke about the horrors very tersely, in short, disconnected phrases. He kept his hands behind his back, his face seemingly indifferent to what he was saying, his voice calm.

"They rip the guts out of a Red Army soldier. Nail them to a post. Then drive him round and round the post with their rifle butts until his guts are all wound on the post."

"What sort of post?" asked Gorky, stern and practical.

"Any sort. A telegraph pole, for instance."

"Pretty awful," said Gorky, rubbing his hands as though he were cold. "Pretty awful. What about the partisans?"

"The partisans are all right. They are easy to get along with."

Gorky gave Ivanov a suspicious look, but curiosity and sympathetic admiration gained the upper hand; there was something epic in the fugitive's improbable stories, he could hardly be lying, he had seen too much—and if he embellished his

stories a bit, well, it was so well done it would have been a pity not to have heard his horrible embellishments.

After that the fugitive found a place to live in the Vyborg District, in the altar room of a former hospital chapel; the four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, looked down piously at his desk from their home on the ceiling. A strange sort of life was going on on that desk, nothing like the mysteries at the throne of the Lord; sheets of calendered paper with tables, maps and pictures on one side and covered with pencilled scribble on the other, were being piled up, torn and cut. Vsevolod Ivanov was writing horror stories on illustrations torn from an encyclopaedia and was writing them with the frantic speed of a man haunted by memories of the horrors he had witnessed. Gorky telephoned him occasionally. He ran from the altar room to a neighbouring apartment and listened to Gorky's solicitous questions.

"Are you getting any bread?... Are you writing?... Excellent, carry on."

That was the beginning of Gorky's solicitude for the daily bread of absolutely unknown young writers, and Vsevolod Ivanov was the first of them to queue up with a sack over his back to obtain bread at the House of the Scientists.

I am confident that Ivanov was one of the boldest writers of the post-October period. He managed to achieve chemical fusion of scarcely compatible things—the brutal truth and winged fantasy. His prose writings about the Civil War were one of the fountain-heads of Soviet literature. His fellow writers had to admit that he was the first after the war to introduce new revolutionary material into the writer's craft with great artistic strength; this was something the entire rising generation of Russian literature was trying to achieve.

Vsevolod Ivanov was probably one of the most fortunate discoveries Gorky ever made among writers.

...Early 1921 was the most difficult time for Gorky. His illness was developing rapidly, and it would be hard to name another ailment that can compare with consumption in its great ability to disturb the equilibrium of the spirit.

I saw him in January at the House of the Arts, on the occasion of an evening devoted to world literature. Sitting at a little table, he opened the proceedings with a speech of a few phrases. In the silence of the hushed hall his laboured breathing could be clearly heard. He had made an effort to overcome fatigue and had mustered the last of his strength—that was obvious and was the cause of great concern to those present. He finished speaking and, swaying a little, walked out with long, slow strides, as if his usual light tread had deserted him for ever.

Never before had I climbed the narrow staircase on Kronverksky Street in such a state of mind; it was not because it was cold and gloomy as it usually is in October, and not because I was ill—it was neither, it was because I knew I was going there for the last time, that I was going to say "goodbye". Gorky was going away for a cure, as we said in those days, at first to Nauheim and then, probably, to Finland. What could be better? I knew only too well that he was approaching the point beyond which there might be no cure and I could well imagine how he would look when I entered and he rose to greet me. But that one word "*goodbye*" cast a gloom over everything, and an involuntary selfishness would not be reconciled with the inevitable: Gorky needed it, it would do him good,

but would it be good for me, for us, for the whole world of hopes that he had founded with such good will and at such great speed? Of course, he had to go away for treatment. Dying was not so very clever—Blok's terrible end was still fresh in the memory and everyone was still amazed at the rapidity of it. But what should I do about my feelings of pity, the bitter consciousness that I would be talking to him for the last time?...

Much later Gorky quoted in his reminiscences of Lenin a letter that finally made him decide on a trip abroad.

Spitting blood the way you are and not wanting to go!! Really, it's a shameless and quite irrational attitude. In Europe, in a good sanatorium, you'll not only take a cure but get three times as much work done. Really! Here you can neither be treated nor work. It's just turmoil, all turmoil. Do go and get well. Please, don't be stubborn.

Yours,
Lenin

I was again astonished that Gorky mostly displayed concern for others, for those whom he was leaving. But he also spoke about himself, clumsily, confusedly, smiling shyly and raising first one, then the other shoulder.

The folds on his face had increased in number and they were more pendulous. His eyes burnt more brightly and the blue of them was more transparent; the fever did not put more life into his glance but only gave greater prominence to the fatigue that had forced its way into his every feature.

"I almost died in Moscow, I can tell you. Nothing like it ever happened to me before. I've been in danger before but never felt it. But this time I felt it, you understand, I felt that I might possibly die."

He laughed vivaciously, in childish amazement, and repeated it several times with wide-open eyes:

"I felt I might die.... Very possible, you understand, very.... They discovered I had some sort of dilatation of the heart.... And the worst of it is I have to believe it...."

Becoming suddenly serious, as though he had caught himself talking of something that had no importance, he began to question me.

"What's happening to you, sir?"

I had just come out of a clinic and would soon have to go to hospital for an operation and, when I told him so, he began to ask me anxiously who would operate, who would take care of me after the operation.

"It's a simple operation," he said, not believing his own words or that I would be deceived by them. "But what will you do after it? You'll need food, that is, of course ... an inconvenience. Where to get the food from, eh?"

He had a fit of coughing that lasted a long time, and all the while he shook an outstretched forefinger to indicate that he had an idea and that I should have patience—when he had finished coughing he would tell me.

"Just wait a bit," he managed to say, barely recovering his breath. "My books are coming out, I'll get the fees and I'll send the money. To all the Serapionites."

"Take care of yourself," he said suddenly and with a tenderness that came from the heart. "Tell your people to look after you, too. Yes, that's right—look after one another.... I have the warmest feelings for that group. It must be saved, it must be preserved at any cost...."

He strode across the room to me smiling his one-sided smile that had formerly upset me very much,

and tapped me on the shoulder, clumsily, trying to keep his emotions under control.

"You've got terribly thin," he muttered softly. "And so Grekov is going to cut you up, eh? A good surgeon, a master.... Of course, it might be better if Fyodorov did it...."

He looked at me in anxiety, and then argued confidently against himself.

"It's care after the operation that matters, and that we'll arrange. That we'll certainly arrange...."

Once again, for the last time, I got the momentary feeling that I could go right into his eyes; then the feeling was gone, it was behind me, as everything else was behind me.

I stood for a while downstairs, by the gate, and before I left I had to get over a feeling that was disturbing me, disturbing me because I could not understand it. I had to muster a lot of strength, sheer physical strength, and when, at last, I succeeded, I said to myself with a sudden sense of emancipation—but I'm a lucky man. What a lucky man I am!...

Translated by George H. Hanna

Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky. 1911.

The Peter and Paul Fortress is one of the largest history museums in Leningrad. In tsarist times it was a prison for particularly dangerous political offenders

Simon Arshakovich Ter-Petrosyan ("Kamo")

MAXIM GORKY

Maxim Gorky wrote of the Russian revolutionaries that they were a phenomenon of which he knew no equal in spiritual beauty and love of the world.

An artist of the revolution, Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) was throughout his life closely connected with the proletarian movement. He was personally acquainted with many outstanding revolutionaries of his time and wrote about some of them. His reminiscences of Lenin, whose friend he was, rank first among Soviet writings about the leader of the revolution. Gorky's novel *Mother* was based on certain facts from the life of the Russian revolutionary Pyotr Zalomov and his mother, both of whom Gorky knew well and maintained friendly relations with till the end of his life.

The story that follows is about Simon Ter-Petrosyan, known in the annals of the revolution as "Kamo".

KAMO

In November-December 1905, in my flat in the building on the corner of Mokhovaya Street and Vozdvizhenka, where the All-Russia Central Executive Committee had its quarters until recently, I had an armed company of twelve Georgians living with me. Organised by Leonid Krasin under "the Committee", a group of Bolshevik comrades, which was trying to direct the revolutionary work of the Moscow workers, the company maintained communications between districts and guarded my flat during conferences. On several occasions it had to go into action against the "Black Hundreds" and on one of these, when a Black-Hundred mob about a thousand strong advanced on the Technical College, where stood the coffin of Bauman, who had been murdered by the scoundrel Mikhalchuk,* this well-armed company of young Georgians succeeded in dispersing the crowd.

They would come home at night, tired out by the work and dangers of the day, and, lying on the floor, teli each other of their experiences. They were all young men between eighteen and twenty-two, and they were under the command of Comrade Arabidze,** who was getting on for thirty, an energetic, very exacting and heroic revolutionary. If I am not mistaken, it was he who in 1908 shot and killed General Azancheyev-Azanchevsky, who was commanding a punitive detachment in Georgia.

It was Arabidze who first mentioned the name Kamo to me and told me a few stories about this

* Mikhalchuk was a janitor of a house in Nemetskaya Street (now named after Bauman). At his trial for the murder of Bauman he was acquitted. In 1906 he was charged with theft and convicted.

** The Georgian actor Vaso Arabidze.

exceptionally bold exponent of revolutionary techniques.

These stories were so astonishing and fabulous that even in those heroic days it was hard to believe that a man could combine almost superhuman courage with constant success in his work, and exceptional resourcefulness with child-like innocence of heart. It struck me then that if I were to put down on paper all that I had heard, no one would believe that such a person really existed and my picture of Kamo would be regarded as a novelist's make-believe. So, nearly everything that Arabidze told me I attributed to the revolutionary romanticism of the narrator.

But, as not infrequently happens, the reality proved more complex and more startling than any "make-believe".

Not long afterwards these stories about Kamo were confirmed by N. N. Flerov, a man I had known way back in 1892 in Tiflis, when he had been a proof-reader on the newspaper *Kavkaz*. In those days he had been a "populist", just back from exile in Siberia. He was a very tired man, but he had dipped into Marx and was extremely eloquent in trying to persuade me and my comrade Afanasyev that "history is working in our favour".

Like many of the tired ones, he liked evolution better than revolution.

But in 1905 he turned up in Moscow a changed man.

"There's a social revolution beginning in this country, old chap. Do you realise that? Yes, and it's really going to happen because it has started from the bottom, from the soil," he said, coughing drily, in the careful voice of a man whose lungs are being eaten up by tuberculosis. It was good to see that he had lost the near-sightedness of a narrow

rationalist and I was delighted to hear such warmth in his voice.

"And what amazing revolutionaries are coming out of the working-class environment! Just listen to this!"

He started telling us about some amazing person and, when I had listened for a while, I asked, "Is his name Kamo?"

"So, you know him, eh? Only from hearsay...."

He rubbed his high forehead and the sparse grey curls on his balding skull, thought for a moment, and then said something that reminded me of the rationalist he had been thirteen years ago.

"When people talk a lot about a person, it means he's an unusual person and, perhaps, that 'one swallow' that 'doesn't make a summer'."

But having paid tribute to the past with this reservation, he confirmed what Arabidze had told me and told the following story on his own account.

At the station in Baku, where Flerov was to meet an acquaintance, he was violently pushed by a worker.

"Please, curse me!" the man whispered to him.

Flerov realised there was a good reason for this request and, while he complied, the worker stood holding his cap apologetically and muttering to him under his breath.

"I know you. You're Flerov. I'm being followed. Someone else will be along soon with a bandage round his cheek, and wearing a checked overcoat. Tell him the safe house isn't safe any more—there's an ambush there. Take him home with you. Got it?"

The worker then pulled on his cap and himself shouted rudely, "Enough of your yelling! What's the matter? Did I break one of your ribs, or what?"

Flerov gave a laugh.

"Neatly acted, wasn't it? For a long time afterwards I wondered why he didn't rouse my suspicions, why I submitted so easily. I suppose I was impressed by his air of authority. A provocateur or a government spy would have asked me politely, wouldn't have had the gumption to give me an order. I met him two or three times after that and once he spent the night with me and we had a long chat. Theoretically he is not very well equipped. He knows this and is very much ashamed of the fact, but he just hasn't the time for reading and educating himself. And he doesn't really need to. You see, he's a revolutionary to the core, in all his emotions, he'll never be shaken. Revolutionary work is as much a physical necessity to him as air and bread."

About two years later, on the Island of Capri I was given another glimpse of Kamo by Leonid Krasin. We were recalling various old comrades and suddenly he gave a little laugh.

"Remember how surprised you were when I winked in the street at that dashing Caucasian officer? 'Who's that?' you said in surprise. I told you it was Prince Dadeshkeliani, an acquaintance of mine from Tiflis. Remember? I was sure you didn't believe I could know such a dandy and suspected me of pulling your leg. Actually, it was Kamo. He played the part beautifully! Now he has been arrested in Berlin and this time it's probably all up with him. He has gone mad. Between you and me, he's not all that mad. But I don't suppose that will save him. The Russian Embassy wants him extradited. If the gendarmes know even half of what he's been up to, they'll hang Kamo."

I related all I knew about Kamo and asked Krasin how much of it was true.

"It may all be true," he said after a moment's thought. "I, too, have heard all these tales of his

amazing resourcefulness and daring. Of course, the workers, in their desire to have a hero of their own, may be slightly embroidering the tale of Kamo's exploits, creating a revolutionary legend with an eye to stimulating class-consciousness. But he is an exceptionally original chap. Sometimes one feels he has been spoiled by success and plays the fool a bit. But this is not just youthful recklessness, not showing off and not romanticism, it originates from something else. He plays the fool very seriously, but at the same time he seems to do it in a dream, without any regard for reality. Take the following incident. In Berlin, not long before his arrest he was walking down the street with a comrade, a Russian girl, and she pointed to a kitten sitting in the window of a burgher's house and said, 'Isn't he lovely!' Kamo gave one jump, snatched the kitten off the window-sill and presented it to his companion—'Here you are! Please, take it!'

"The girl had to convince the Germans that the kitten had jumped out of the window itself. That's not the only story of its kind, and my explanation is that Kamo has no sense of property whatsoever. That 'please, take it!' is often on his lips when it's a matter of his own shirt or boots or any of his personal belongings.

"Perhaps it's just kindness? No. But he's an excellent comrade. He makes no distinction between mine and thine. It's always 'our group', 'our party', 'our cause'.

"And there was another incident, also in Berlin. In a very crowded street, a shopkeeper threw a boy out of his doorway. Kamo went rushing into the shop and his frightened companion could scarcely hold him back. 'Let me go, please,' he shouted struggling, 'he needs a sock on the jaw!' Perhaps he was rehearsing his part as a madman, but I doubt it. At that time we couldn't let him go out

unaccompanied. He was certain to get into some sort of trouble.

"He did tell me once that during an act of expropriation, when he was to throw a bomb, he thought he was being shadowed by two detectives. There was only about a minute left. So he walked up to the detectives and said, 'Get out, I'm going to shoot!' "

'And did they?' I asked.

" 'Of course, they did.'

" 'But why did you tell them that?'

" 'Why not? I thought I had better, so I did.'

" 'But what was the real reason? Were you sorry for them?'

"That made him angry and he flushed.

" 'Not a bit sorry! Perhaps they were just poor people. What had it to do with them? Why should they hang about there? I wasn't the only one throwing bombs. They might have got injured or killed.'

"There was another incident that enlarges and perhaps explains his conduct in this case. In Didub he once thought he was being tailed by a spy, so he grabbed the man, held him against a wall and started talking to him in the following manner: 'You're a poor man, aren't you? Then why do you work against the poor? Are the rich your comrades? Why are you a scoundrel? Do you want me to kill you?'

"The man said he didn't want to be killed. He turned out to be a worker from the Batumi group. He had come to fetch revolutionary literature but had lost the address of the comrade he used to stay with and was trying to find the place from memory. So, you see what an original chap Kamo is?"

The finest of Kamo's exploits was the brilliant pretence that deceived the omniscient Berlin psychiatrists. But Kamo's skilful malingering did not

help him much. The government of Wilhelm II handed him over to the tsarist gendarmes. He was put in chains, taken to Tiflis and confined to the mental department of the Mikhailovsky Hospital. If I am not mistaken, he simulated madness for three years. His escape from the hospital was also a fantastic exploit.

I met Kamo in person in 1920, in Moscow, in Fortunatova's flat, which used to be mine, on the corner of Vozdvizhenka and Mokhovaya Street.

A strong well-knit man with a typical Caucasian face and a good, very attentive and stern look in his soft dark eyes, he was wearing Red Army uniform

There was a certain restraint and caution in his movements that suggested he was somewhat embarrassed by his unaccustomed surroundings. I realised at once that he was tired of being questioned about his revolutionary work and was now completely absorbed in something else. He was studying to enter the Military Academy.

"Science is difficult to understand," he said disappointedly, patting and stroking a textbook, as though he were fondling an angry dog. "There aren't enough pictures. Books ought to have more pictures, so that you can tell what dispositions are right away. Do you know what they are?"

I didn't and Kamo gave me an embarrassed smile.

"You see—"

The smile was helpless, almost child-like. I knew that kind of helplessness well because I had experienced it myself in my youth, when confronted with the verbal wisdom of books. And I could well understand how difficult it must be to overcome the resistance of books for a fearless man of action whose service to the revolution consisted mainly in creating new facts.

This gave me a great liking for Kamo from the start and the more we got to know each other the more he impressed me with the depth and accuracy of his revolutionary feeling.

It was quite impossible to equate everything I knew about Kamo's legendary daring, superhuman will and amazing self-control with the man who sat before me at a desk piled with textbooks.

It seemed incredible that after such enormous and sustained effort he should have remained such a gentle unaffected person so young in heart, so fresh and strong.

He had still not outlived his youth and was romantically in love with a very fine, although not startlingly beautiful woman, who was, I believe, older than himself.

He spoke of his love with the lyrical passion of which only chaste and vigorous young men are capable.

"She's wonderful! She's a doctor and she knows everything, everything about science. When she comes home from work she says to me 'What's this you can't understand? But it's so simple!' And she's right, it is! Very simple! What a person she is!"

And when describing his love with words that sometimes sounded ridiculous, he would lapse into unexpected pauses, ruffle his thick curly hair and look at me with a silent question on his lips.

"Well, and what then?" I would encourage him.

"You see, it's like this—" he would say vaguely, and then I should have to pump him for a long time to hear the most naïve of all questions:

"Perhaps I ought not to get married?"

"Why not?"

"Well, you know, there's the revolution, I've got a lot of study and work to do. We're surrounded by enemies, we've got to fight!"

And by his knitted brows and the stern light in

his eyes I could see he was really tortured by the question. Would not marriage be a betrayal of the revolution? It was strange, a little comic and singularly moving that the youthful vigour and freshness of his virility should be at odds with his tremendous revolutionary energy.

He spoke with the same passionate enthusiasm about the need to go abroad and work there as he did about his love.

"I've asked Lenin to let me go. 'I'll be a useful man there,' I tell him. 'No,' he says, 'you've got to study!' So, there you are. He knows! Ah, what a man! Laughs like a kid. Have you ever heard him laugh?"

His face brightened in a smile, then clouded again as he complained of the difficulties of studying military science.

When I asked him about the past, he unwillingly confirmed all the amazing tales about him, but frowned and added little that was new to me.

"I did a lot of silly things as well," he said one day. "I once got a policeman drunk with wine and tarred his head and beard for him. We knew each other and he asked me, 'What were you carrying in that basket yesterday?' 'Eggs,' I said. 'And what papers underneath?' 'No papers!' 'You're lying,' he says, 'I saw the papers!' 'Well, why didn't you search me then?' 'I was coming back from the baths,' he says. The silly fool! I was angry with him for forcing me to tell lies, so I took him to an inn. He got drunk as a lord and I gave him a good tarring. I was young in those days, liked playing the fool." And he screwed up his face, as if he had tasted something sour.

I tried to talk him into writing his memoirs, arguing that they would be useful to young people who were unfamiliar with revolutionary techniques.

He shook his curly head and for a long time would not agree.

"I can't do it. I don't know how. What sort of writer would I make—an uncultured fellow like me."

But he agreed when he saw that his reminiscences would also be of service to the revolution, and as always, no doubt, having once taken a decision, he set about carrying it out.

He wrote not very correctly and rather colourlessly, and obviously tried to say more about his comrades and less about himself. When I pointed this out to him, he grew angry.

"Do you expect me to worship myself? I'm not a priest."

"Do priests worship themselves?"

"Well, who else then? Young ladies worship themselves, don't they?"

But after this he began to write more vividly and with less restraint about himself.

He was handsome in his own way, though one did not realise it at once.

Before me sat a strong, lithe figure in the uniform of the Red Army, but I could see him as a worker, as a deliverer of eggs, a cab-driver, a dandy, Prince Dadeshkeliani, a madman in chains, a madman who had induced learned men of science to believe in his madness.

I don't remember what made me mention Triadze, a man with only three fingers on his left hand, who had stayed with me on Capri.

"Yes, I know him—he's a Menshevik!" Kamo said and, with a shrug and a frown of contempt, went on: "I can't understand the Mensheviks. What makes them like that? They live in the Caucasus, in a land like ours—mountains shooting up to the sky, rivers rushing into the sea, princes all over the place, with all their riches, while the people are

poor. Why are the Mensheviks such a weak lot? Why don't they want a revolution?"

He talked at great length and with increasing warmth, but there was one idea for which he just could not find the right words. His outburst ended with a heavy sigh.

"The working people have a lot of enemies. And the most dangerous is the kind that can tell untruths in our own language."

Naturally, what I most wanted to understand was how this man, who was so "innocent-minded", had found the strength and skill to convince experienced psychiatrists that he was mad.

But apparently he did not like being questioned about this. He would shrug and answer evasively.

"Well, what can I say? I had to do it! I was saving my skin and I thought it would help the revolution."

And only when I said that in his memoirs he would have to write about this critical period in his life, and it would have to be well considered and perhaps I might be useful to him, did he become very thoughtful, even closing his eyes and clenching the fingers of both hands together till they were like a single fist.

He began to speak slowly: "What can I say? They kept feeling me, tapping my knees, tickling me, all the rest of it.... But they couldn't feel my soul with their fingers, could they? They made me look in the glass and what a face I saw there! Not my own. Someone very thin, with long matted hair and wild eyes—ugly devil! Horrible!

"I bared my teeth. Maybe I really am mad, I thought to myself. That was a terrible moment! But I thought of the right thing to do and spat at the mirror. They both gave each other the wink, like a couple of crooks, you know. Yes, they

liked that, I thought—a man forgetting his own face!"

He was silent for a moment, then went on softly.

"What I really thought about a lot was, will I hold out or will I really go mad? That was bad, I couldn't trust myself, you see? It was like dangling over the edge of a precipice. I couldn't see what I was holding on to."

And after another pause he smiled broadly.

"Of course, they know their job, their science. But they don't know the Caucasians. Maybe any Caucasian would seem a madman to them, eh? And this one was a Bolshevik as well. Yes, I thought of that too. Who wouldn't? Well, let's keep it up, I thought, and see who gets the other mad first. I didn't manage it. They stayed as they were, and so did I. In Tiflis they didn't test me so much. I reckon they thought the Germans couldn't have been mistaken."

Of all he told me that was his longest story.

And it seemed to be the most unpleasant for him. A few minutes later he returned to the subject unexpectedly. He gave me a nudge with his shoulder —we were sitting beside each other—and said in a quiet voice, but harshly:

"There's a Russian word—*yarost.** Do you know it? I never understood what it meant, this *yarost.* But when I was before those doctors I reckon I was in a *yarost,* so it seems to me now. *Yarost*—that's a fine word. Is it true there used to be a Russian god called Yarilo?"

And when he heard that there was such a god, and that this god was the personification of the creative forces, Kamo laughed.

For me Kamo was one of those revolutionaries for whom the future is more real than the present.

* The nearest English equivalent is "fury".—*Tr.*

This does not mean that they are dreamers. Not at all. It means that the power of their emotional class revolutionary spirit is so harmoniously and soundly organised that it feeds their reason, provides soil for it to grow in and ranges ahead of it.

Outside their revolutionary work the whole reality in which their class lives seems to them like a bad dream, a nightmare, and the true reality in which they live is the socialist future.

Translated by Robert Daglish

MITYA PAVLOV

Mitya Pavlov, from Sormovo, where I come from myself, died of typhus somewhere in Yelets.

In 1905, during the Moscow uprising, he brought us from St. Petersburg a big box of fulminate of mercury capsules and thirty-five feet of fuse, wound round his chest. Either his sweating had made the fuse swell, or it had been too tightly wrapped round his ribs, but as soon as he entered my room Mitya collapsed on the floor, his face turned blue and his eyes bulged, as if he were dying of asphyxia.

"You must be crazy, Mitya! You might have fainted on the way here. D'you realise what would have happened to you then?"

Gasping for breath, he replied guiltily, "We'd have lost the fuse, and the capsules as well."

M. Tikhvinsky, who was massaging his chest, also scolded him grumpily, but Mitya was screwing up his eyes and asking questions.

"How many bombs will it make? Will they smash us? Is Presnya still holding out?"

Then, from where he was lying on the sofa he sent a look at Tikhvinsky, who was examining the capsules.

"Is he the one who makes the bombs?" he asked in a whisper. "Is he a professor? A worker? You don't say—"

And all of a sudden he inquired anxiously:

"He won't blow you up, will he?"

And not one word about himself, about the danger he had only just escaped by a hair's breadth.

Translated by Robert Daglish

YURI GERMAN

Yuri German (1910-67) first made an impression on the reading public in the thirties with his successful *Our Acquaintances.* After the war he wrote *Young Russia* and *Lieutenant-Colonel, Medical Corps.* His popular trilogy about Doctor Vladimir Ustimenko (*The Cause You Serve, The Staunch and The True, Eternal Battle*) has been translated into many European languages. Among German's best known works are his stories about that splendid revolutionary Felix Dzerzhinsky, one of which is published here.

A WALK IN THE YARD

In Sedlece prison his cell-mate was Anton Rossol. Consumption was doing its work with ruthless speed and Anton was dying. He hardly ever got up from his plank bed and at night he was racked with fits of coughing, during which he spat blood; and although he was rapidly losing what little strength he had, he felt no desire to eat. For hours he would lie staring at the dirty wall of the cell with only one thought in his mind, "It is hard to die at twenty."

It is indeed terrible to die in prison, far away from family and friends, to die behind iron bars, with the clank of fetters, the harsh voices of the gaolers and the cries of one's comrades being led away to execution ringing in one's ears. But how much more terrible it is to die there in spring, when beyond the iron grille of the window the chestnuts are in bloom, when every day the sky grows bluer and more transparent, and when you know that the air out there must be so fresh and pure. To die in prison at a time like that!

There is nothing to equal man's cruelty to man. Rossol could, of course, have been let out on bail and, who knows, out in the country, with the grass and trees all round, and fresh milk to drink, he might have recovered, might have cheated death, and even had he not recovered, he would have been able to hope for recovery. But he was not released, on the grounds that there was no hope left and, even, if he were given his liberty, he would die all the same. So he might just as well die in prison. And this would be not "just as well", but much better for the state, because before he died he would probably get frightened and begin to talk about things he refused to discuss at present. He might mention certain people's names, give the gendarme

captain in charge of the case a chance to distinguish himself, and help to put safely away in gaol another dozen or so of those who hated the autocracy.

So, they kept him in prison.

His legs had given up and he was too weak to move, but still they kept him behind bars. A big padlock hung on the door of his cell and several times a day the gaoler looked in through the peephole—just to see whether everything was all right, to make sure the bed-ridden Rossol was not digging an escape tunnel or filing through the window bars.

And though Rossol had so little strength, the gendarme interrogator never questioned him except in the presence of a warder, because prisoners of this kind had nothing to lose, they were capable of anything, and you could not be too careful.

Those exhausting fits of coughing at night were torture, but the prison doctor Oberyukhtin, who wrote articles on malingering for some professional journal, tried to detect malingering in this case, too, and, having failed to do so, lost interest in his patient and stopped visiting him.

Rossol did not want to go to the prison hospital. He had been there for two weeks already and returned to prison at his own wish. The hospital was even more terrifying than his cell. It was so terrifying that Anton simply refused to answer when Dzerzhinsky asked why he had come back. Dismissing the question with a wave of his hand, he lay down on the plank bed, closed his eyes and said, "This is paradise."

Dzerzhinsky could imagine what the hospital must be like if this was "paradise".

One day towards evening Rossol said, "It must have been [illegible] that did it."

"What [illegible]?"

"Didn't I ever tell you?"

"No, never."

"Some time ago, before you arrived," Rossol began unhurriedly, "I had a visit from the prison governor. He sat down and started talking. Wanted to know how I was and all that. I just kept quiet and listened. He went on about the autocracy and the tsar being a good thing, and revolution a bad thing—you know the kind of talk. I didn't argue with him. Go and stuff yourself, I thought. But on he went and eventually he asked me what we intended to do with him if the revolution was victorious. I thought he was joking, just making conversation, so to speak. But when I looked at him I saw he was quite serious. There was a real look of interest in his eyes. Well, I tried to put him off with a joke. But how could we do anything to you, I said. You're much too high in rank and position. 'None of that,' he says, 'I'm asking seriously. You never know what may happen and my future is a matter of great interest to me. I have a wife and children. I must know what the prospects are.' Yes, that's how he put it—'I must know what the prospects are.' "

"Well? And what then?" Dzerzhinsky asked.

"I went on trying to laugh it off, but the more I joked, the more I wanted to say what I really thought. Know the feeling?"

"Indeed, I do," Dzerzhinsky replied with a chuckle.

"Well, we went on talking. I told him to ask the others, because I shouldn't be alive to see the day. But I knew I was going to say it, I could feel it in my bones. I longed for that pleasure, though I knew it was going to cost me quite a lot. Still, I thought, I'll give myself that one little pleasure, then come what may. And so I did."

"How did you put it?"

"Oh, very politely. In a very gentle, tactful, almost friendly way. 'Well, Your Honour,' I said to him, 'if you really want to know, the one thing we certainly shall do is to shoot you. But it was you who asked me. I didn't force you into this intimate conversation.' But, can you imagine, even after that he wouldn't leave me alone. Is that your personal opinion, he asked, or is it shared by your comrades?"

"And then in conclusion you got a flogging?"

"No, we went on talking for a bit," Rossol replied, "on all kinds of learned prison subjects. Quite a long time, in fact. It wasn't until we said good-bye that he told me he would put me down for a hundred strokes, just to stop me getting cocky and thinking too much about the nearness of the revolution and our getting even with certain people. And he finished up with a Russian proverb he said I ought always to remember, 'Don't spit in the well—you may need the water for drinking.' And I said I knew another one just as good, 'Spit in the well and it will be no use for drinking.' "

Dzerzhinsky laughed.

"Did they flog you?"

"Of course."

"A hundred?"

"Don't know, don't remember, I started counting, but then I fainted."

They were silent for a while. Then Rossol said suddenly: "Perhaps it was that flogging that did it. It may have been that and not the illness. Perhaps they caused some internal injury. It may not be T.B. at all. What do you think?"

He hoped and believed that perhaps, if they let him out, if he could have plenty of fresh, clean air, plenty of milk and vegetables, good care and sunshine, he would get well again and live for a long time, perhaps even to be a hundred. And with all

the strength and fervour he could command Dzerzhinsky encouraged his cell-mate's dream of recovery. He encouraged it so forcefully and seriously that at times he even found himself believing that they would both live long and would go on working right up to the time of the revolution and afterwards, when the revolution was victorious and everything would be different, when there would be freedom and justice.

He talked to Rossol about science and about the tremendous progress that was being made in medicine. He said that Pasteur's discovery might well be followed by other equally great discoveries. Any day some scientist might learn how to rid the world of consumption and make it just as much a ghost of the past as smallpox was now. Then they would soon get Rossol on his feet and he would start working for the revolution again and getting put in prison and escaping and having rows with the prison governors, in other words, start living the life he had chosen for himself. Rossol listened doubtfully but with attention. He wanted to be convinced of something he did not believe but very much wanted to believe.

The usual effect of such conversations was to put Rossol in a much better and more confident mood. A smile would appear on his pale lips and his eyes would recover the challenging, boyish expression that Dzerzhinsky loved so much.

Dzerzhinsky gave all the energy and strength of mind he possessed to helping Rossol.

He would stay awake at night if he heard in the darkness of the cell that Anton was awake. Pretending that he couldn't sleep either, he would try to divert the sick man with some amusing tale, laughing at it himself although he had no desire to laugh or tell stories. He wanted to sleep. He was exhausted by the wearisome days in prison, by the irrita-

bility that Anton sometimes directed unjustly against him, by the efforts it cost him to obtain in this barbarously run prison a piece of ice for the sick man, some salt water or boiled water, a little of the right medicine, or a clean cloth.

But what was the alternative?

How could he leave a dying man to his fears, to despair and suffering?

So, Dzerzhinsky would sit down at the foot of Anton's plank bed, in that dark, evil-smelling cell, and launch into cheerful conversation.

"What a good thing you're not asleep! I can't sleep either. I've been lying awake all this time, couldn't get a wink of sleep."

"Why can't you sleep?" Anton would ask suspiciously.

"I don't know," Dzerzhinsky replied. "You know yourself what sleeping in prison is like."

"Before I got ill I slept very well in prison."

There would often be irritation in Rossol's voice and Dzerzhinsky would feel he was looking for something to pick on, an excuse to let off steam.

"I could sleep anywhere," Rossol would go on, getting more and more worked up with every word. "But when I'm ill, then I really can't sleep.... But I'm not asking anyone," his voice began to crack, "I'm not asking anyone to stay awake because of me. On the contrary, please go to sleep and don't spoil your night's rest, and your temper for the whole of tomorrow. All I want is to be left in peace. Yes, left in peace! That's all!"

Rossol's voice would rise until it broke off suddenly on a high note. Sometimes there would be tears in his voice, resentment because he had not been able to get to sleep, while Dzerzhinsky had slept on and not heard him trying to reach for water, not heard him drop the mug, and had left him with nothing to drink all this time.

"Why didn't you give me a shout?"

"Because I know you're fed up with me. I wear you out, worry you to death, but I can't help it, I haven't the strength—"

"But that's nonsense, Anton—"

"It's not nonsense! I am unbearable with my moods and fault-finding, but if you only knew how terrible I feel, how much I want to stay alive, how sick and tired I am of these thoughts of death, of the thought that I shall die soon, very soon, and leave nothing behind, that I shall have achieved nothing, nothing at all. . . ."

And in his weakened state Rossol would break down and sob bitterly with his face buried in the hard straw bolster and, while he choked with tears, his hot wet hand would reach out for Dzerzhinsky's in the darkness and, squeezing it, he would whisper: "Tell me what to do! How can I go on? How? What hope is there? Help me!. . . And don't despise me. Don't think I'm a coward, a poor beaten wretch. I'm ill. It's this illness. It isn't my fault. It isn't my fault at all. Answer me! You understand it's not my fault, don't you?"

"Yes, I understand," Dzerzhinsky replied in all sincerity. "Of course, I understand. This will pass when you get better."

And again, just as he had done the day before, and the day before that, he talked of what would happen when Anton got better, of how they would come out of prison together and go and swim in the river, then go off through the forest and have supper in some forest inn. He knew just the one, at a cross-roads—a real old inn.

As he talked he saw Rossol's eyes shining in the darkness, burning with the desire to live, to walk in the forest, to go to the river, to the inn, to town, anywhere where there were people and music playing, where there were no iron bars, through

which even the dawning spring day looked grey and sad, where there were no fetters, no gaolers and no endless, exhausting prison nights.

"We'd go to a café together," Rossol would say, adding to the dream. "You've forgotten about the café. We'd choose a really smart café, one with a full orchestra playing. And we'd sit there like a couple of gentlemen and order God knows what, I just can't imagine what we'd order."

And Dzerzhinsky would listen to his friend and talk all sorts of nonsense just to bring some sort of smile to those parched lips. And while he talked he would be thinking of something quite different. Weak, consumptive, dying Rossol was stronger than hundreds or even thousands of perfectly healthy people. What tremendous, superhuman strength of will Anton must have, loving freedom and life as he did and knowing that he need only drop a hint to his interrogator, just the smallest hint, just a clue for the gendarme to pick up, and he would be released the very same day and be able to go to the forest, to the river, to the forest inn, anywhere he liked....

He was being kept here without trial because they hoped he would suddenly lose his nerve and start giving away everything he knew for the sake of freedom.

After all, how could they try him? They couldn't very well carry him into court on a stretcher, as they did to interrogation.

And it would be awkward to send him to Siberia after the court had passed sentence. And what was more, the court might not reach the right kind of verdict.

So they were keeping him here, hoping that he would talk.

But he wouldn't talk.

No matter what threats they made, he would just

give them his fierce, stubborn smile and answer, "I don't care! I don't care a damn."

And his eyes would blaze like a young wolf's.

One stuffy evening, when the first thunder of the year was in the air, Rossol said sadly, "Tomorrow you'll be out strolling through the puddles. How I'd love to do that!"

He said it half seriously, half in jest, then fell silent for the rest of the evening, listening to the patter of the rain, staring at the rusty window bars and coughing. And when Dzerzhinsky returned the following day, after the exercise period, Rossol asked:

"Well, had your stroll through the puddles?"

"Yes," Dzerzhinsky replied, feeling guilty.

"Were they big ones?"

"No, not very."

"Were they deep?" Rossol persisted.

"Just puddles," Dzerzhinsky replied and, to change the subject, related how offended the new warder had been when the prisoners thought he intended shutting them up before the exercise period was over.

But Rossol was not listening.

"I've got to get my freedom," he said in a strange voice. "No matter how, I must get out. Understand, Yatsek? I can't stick it any longer. I've got to get out!"

Dzerzhinsky looked at Rossol without speaking.

"They've got to let me out," Rossol said. "They've got to. D'you hear!"

There was such despair in his voice that Dzerzhinsky felt his throat tighten.

"I want to be free," Rossol shouted, raising himself on his elbow and staring into Dzerzhinsky's face with eyes that were near to madness. "I want freedom no matter what it costs. There's a limit to

any man's endurance. Say what you like, Yatsek, but I can't go on. Let me out of prison. To hell with—"

Dzerzhinsky had to bring him round with water. He was hardly in his right mind. And Dzerzhinsky, quite overwhelmed with pity and compassion, suddenly found himself saying that he would try to arrange things, so that Anton could go for a walk tomorrow with the rest.

"Me? Go for a walk?" Rossol repeated, unbelievingly.

"Yes, you," Dzerzhinsky replied.

He knew full well that Rossol could not possibly go out for a walk, but now it was too late. He had given his word in desperation and Rossol had taken him seriously; he wanted to believe that he would go out for a walk, that he would see the sky, the sun, the trees, the grass, the puddles. . . .

"But the puddles will be dry by tomorrow," Dzerzhinsky said.

Rossol was not listening. He talked but asked no more questions. He was afraid to ask because he knew he would discover there could be no walk, that it was all a dream. "A walk? What are you talking about?" Dzerzhinsky would say, and that would be that.

So, instead of asking questions, he talked of the outing he would have tomorrow.

Of course, it wouldn't actually be a walk, but it didn't matter what you called it. He would be outside, sitting in the fresh air, in the sunshine, in the yard, and, just to celebrate, he would make himself a makhorka cigarette and have a few puffs, come what may. Let the others go plodding round in a circle, like fools. He would sit and look at the sky. Or—no, he wouldn't smoke a cigarette, it would be silly to smoke in the fresh air. Just a waste! He would pick a blade of grass and chew that. My God,

but it was a long time since he had chewed grass. And some people were so lucky they could chew it every day....

He would sit on the ground—yes, on the bare ground—and let the others walk around in a circle. Let them walk, he didn't mind.

If only he had a little while in the fresh air, it would give him an appetite. And as soon as he began to eat properly his illness would go away of its own accord. It was all a matter of appetite, wasn't it? You had to smother T.B. in fats, in milk and cream. It was afraid of food. And after a good outing in the fresh air....

The next day, as the time for exercise drew near, Rossol turned his face to the wall and covered his head with the blanket. The excitement of the previous evening had given way to apathy. He obviously realised that there could be no question of his going for a walk, that the chestnut-trees were not for him, that it had all been a dream.

Several times during the morning Dzerzhinsky spoke to him, but he pretended to be asleep, though sleep was the last thing he was interested in.

A little while before the time for exercise arrived, Dzerzhinsky came over and pulled back the blanket. Anton opened his eyes and stared angrily.

"Get your clothes on, or we'll be late."

"Why should I get my clothes on?"

"We're going out for a walk."

For a second Rossol stared at Dzerzhinsky, trying to understand whether he was joking or serious. But, of course, he was serious. Who could joke about such things?

"But my legs won't hold me," he said. "I'll fall." And he added guiltily: "I'm very weak now, Yatsek. My legs are no good."

"You won't have to use your legs," Dzerzhinsky

replied. "Why should you, if I carry you? I'll be your legs. See?"

"I see," Rossol replied in the same subdued tone. "But I'll be too heavy for you."

"Get dressed and stop talking," Dzerzhinsky ordered. "Then we'll see how heavy you are."

Rossol sat up on the bed and reached for his boots, but the effort made his head swim and he fell back on the pillow. Dzerzhinsky picked up the boots, sat down on the bed beside Rossol and put his arm round his shoulder.

"Never mind about that," Rossol muttered, trying to pull on a boot. "That'll go off. I just got up a bit too suddenly. I'm better now."

But his forehead was already damp from agitation and weakness. He was unable to get a grip on his boot tabs and push his foot into the boot. He had no strength left for anything.

"Now don't get excited," Dzerzhinsky said as gently and cheerfully as he could. "You're not so weak really. It's just excitement, that's the trouble. Take it easy! Don't hurry! Now grip those tabs and pull. Got them? There, see how easy it was! Now the other boot! And that's on too. Easy, isn't it? Now let's have your jacket. Where's that jacket of yours?"

While he dressed Rossol, he pretended that Rossol was dressing himself. He appeared only to be calming his friend, handing him his clothes and chatting to him.

"There, that's fine," he said. "Now you're ready. Now stand up. Don't be in a hurry. Just hold on to me and stand up. That's it, that's fine—"

"My legs won't hold me," Rossol said weakly. "I just can't stand—"

The door swung open with a crash and Zakharkin, the senior warder, entered the cell.

"Time for exercise! Look lively!"

Then he caught sight of Rossol.

"Where's he going? For a walk?!"

"Yes," Dzerzhinsky replied.

"Has to be carried to interrogation but can go for walks," Zakharkin snapped and walked out of the cell, leaving the door open behind him.

Rossol was far too dizzy and weak to stand. Dzerzhinsky's plan to hold him up as they walked along together was a failure from the start. Another solution had to be found, and found quickly. Zakharkin was already forming up the prisoners in the corridor. Any delay would mean being late for exercise.

Rossol's lips were trembling. For the second time since yesterday he was being cheated of his dream.

"Steady, Anton," Dzerzhinsky told him. "Everything is going to be all right. Sit down on the bed."

"What for?"

"Sit down, I tell you!"

There was a note of command in his voice. It had to be obeyed

"Now put your arms over my shoulders. No, not round my neck—over my shoulders! And give me your legs. Got a good grip?"

"Yes."

"Well, hold on then. I'm getting up."

"I'm holding."

Dzerzhinsky straightened up. Now he had Rossol on his back.

"You'll strain yourself, Yatsek," Rossol told him. "You're mad! What are you doing!"

"Sit tight!"

Dzerzhinsky went out into the corridor with Rossol, chalk-faced but completely happy, on his back. The prisoners were already lined up in two grey ranks. In the gloom of the corridor they did not at once notice Dzerzhinsky's burden, but when they did notice, there was a general stir and for a moment some of them fell out of line, only to form

up again immediately as Zakharkin appeared round the corner and shouted an order.

"Atten-shun! Right dress!"

The senior warder was followed by the prison governor and his deputy. This was a fresh complication. The governor and his deputy hardly ever put in an appearance at this time.

Dzerzhinsky had fallen in on the left; the governor began inspecting the ranks from the right.

"Don't worry, comrade," Dzerzhinsky's neighbour, a doctor, with broad shoulders and a big drooping moustache, told him. "They won't say anything. They won't dare!"

"They probably will," Dzerzhinsky replied with a smile. "But I'm not worried. I'll manage somehow."

It was a big strain to carry Rossol. Thin though he was, his big, broad-boned frame weighed a lot. Dzerzhinsky's own strength had been sapped by the long months in prison and with this additional burden he was having difficulty in keeping his feet. The sweat was running down his face and his heart was thumping wildly. But the governor moved so slowly that it seemed as if the ordeal of standing in this dark, damp corridor with Anton on his back would never end. And what hell his nerves were giving him!

The governor was personally inspecting and searching every prisoner. During the exercise period the prisoners often passed notes, letters and even books to one another and the governor had declared war on this practice. So far, to his chagrin, he had found nothing. If the whole search yielded no result, he would look a fool.

The governor's irritation increased as fewer and fewer prisoners remained to be searched. Now he was near enough for Dzerzhinsky to see his pale clean-shaven face with its large nose, angular eyebrows and heavy jaw, and the points of the starched white collar peeping out from under his uniform.

"Why, may I ask, have you a button missing?" the governor asked the next prisoner in his affected accent. "Don't you know the rules? Well we'll soon teach you! Zakharkin! Three days in the punishment cell for him!"

Now he was finding fault with every prisoner; one was not standing properly, another had dared to smile, another had his hands in his pockets, another had dared to ask for his spectacles that had been confiscated during an interrogation.

"Confiscated? What do you mean?"

"My interrogator confiscated them to make me confess sooner," the prisoner four places away from Dzerzhinsky, a man with fine, intelligent features, replied. "I can't see anything at all without spectacles. I request to have them back."

But the prison governor was no longer listening. He had just noticed Dzerzhinsky. He advanced upon him with his assistant, a pimply-faced young man.

"What's this?" the governor exclaimed, screwing up his eyes. "Is this supposed to be a joke? Both of you, stand to attention at once!" he snapped. "At once!"

"My comrade is ill, as you know," Dzerzhinsky said. "He can't stand."

"I order you to stop this," the governor roared. "I order you to stand to attention!"

"But he can't," Dzerzhinsky repeated.

"Silence!" the governor bellowed, turning purple and losing all control of himself. "Back to your cell! I forbid this! Zakharkin! For carrying ... for conveyance ... for unauthorised transportation from a cell—"

But unable to find the right word, he became confused and forgot what he had been going to say. And suddenly a ringing cry from Rossol himself filled the corridor.

"You hangman! We'll shoot you in the end, you hangman!"

What would have happened if Rossol had not burst out coughing at that moment, no one knows. He began to cough so violently that he let go of Dzerzhinsky's shoulders and fell backwards in a faint, his face deathly pale. He would have struck his head on the rough stone floor of the corridor, had it not been for their neighbour, the doctor, who caught him as he fell and relieved Dzerzhinsky of his burden.

Zakharkin ran forward and tried to pull away the doctor's hand, but the doctor resisted. Rossol was still coughing and a thin stream of scarlet blood was trickling from his mouth.

"Back everybody! Keep in line!" the governor roared and unbottoned his revolver holster. "Keep your ranks!"

By this time the doctor was kneeling over Rossol.

Zakharkin again attempted to pull him away.

"Move aside!" Dzerzhinsky said. "Leave us alone!"

"Who are you talking to?" Zakharkin gasped in amazement. He, too, had drawn his revolver.

"Everyone back in line," the governor was still shouting. "Back in line or I fire!"

But there was no line left. It had broken up and the governor was encircled by one group of prisoners, while his pimply assistant was trapped by another. Another group had surrounded Zakharkin and someone was shouting in a voice of frenzy:

"Kill the hangmen, comrades!"

Zakharkin's face turned grey.

"Put your gun away, you swine," Dzerzhinsky told him. "Put it away before they kill you."

And from somewhere over on the left the frenzied, high-pitched voice went on shouting:

"Kill 'em, comrades! Kill the hangmen!"

But no one was killed. The prison governor, his assistant and Zakharkin made off. They were al-

lowed to go and they went. Dzerzhinsky persuaded the prisoners to return to their cells. Rossol was carried back to his bed and the doctor seated himself at his bedside. A hush fell over the prison.

Until evening they waited for retribution, but no retribution came. Zakharkin appeared on the scene and was as nice as pie. He had suddenly become so polite that he actually inquired after Rossol's health through the peep-hole.

"He's feeling better now, thank you," Dzerzhinsky replied with equal politeness.

But Zakharkin still did not go away. Only his shaggy mouth could be seen through the peep-hole.

"Terrible how ill people can get," said the mouth.

To this Dzerzhinsky could find no answer.

By nightfall Rossol recovered consciousness. His thin face was now quite gaunt and tinged with blue. His dark eyes were sunken, his lips furred.

"That was a good walk we had, eh?" he said, trying hard to smile.

"We'll have one tomorrow," Dzerzhinsky replied calmly.

"You think so?"

"I'm sure of it."

He stood over Rossol, a tall, straight figure, and the calm strength of his personality was such that Rossol believed him. Yes, tomorrow they really would have their walk. The decision had been taken and no one could prevent it.

That night, for the first time in many months, Rossol slept soundly. In the morning Dzerzhinsky calmly helped him to get dressed and, when Zakharkin opened the door and announced that it was time for exercise, he hoisted Rossol on to his back and fell in line with the other prisoners.

There was no sign of the prison governor. No one had seen him since the previous day.

Zakharkin pretended to have nothing to do with Dzerzhinsky or his burden or anything else, except organising the exercise period. In fact, he hardly dared look the prisoners in the face.

"Keep in step there!" he shouted now and then, his eyes on the ground. "Hold up those chains! No talking! No hurrying on the stairs!"

With a tramping of boots and a clanking of chains, the prisoners marched along the corridors, down the stairs, and along more corridors.

"Heavy?" the doctor asked Dzerzhinsky.

"I'll get used to it," Dzerzhinsky replied.

They descended the last flight of steps, marched along the last corridor and came out into the cobbled yard. It was a warm, sunny day, almost hot. The chestnuts were still in bloom, their branches bright with pyramids of blossoms, like thick candles on a Christmas-tree. At the head of the column Zakharkin was walking backwards in front of the leading pair, shouting and waving his arms like the leader of a regimental band.

"Keep your distance! One full arm's length! Three paces between each pair! Keep in line there! Otherwise there'll be trouble! No talking!"

But it was so good in the yard that even Zakharkin's stupid bawling could not spoil it.

The sun was beating down.

Pigeons were cooing and strutting in the middle of the yard. And there was a breeze, a real spring breeze.

The sweat was pouring down Dzerzhinsky's face, but he scarcely noticed it.

Above the clanking of fetters and the tramp of hundreds of pairs of boots he could hear Rossol's gasping, delighted voice.

"Yatsek, look at the chestnuts! Can you see them! And the grass! Look, it's coming up through the cobbles. Look over there, on the left—it's quite

green! You must be tired, Yatsek! Is it too much for you? Look, what a fat pigeon! Like a barrel! How can it fly when it's as fat as that?"

Rossol sounded years younger.

And the other prisoners also seemed to be infected with the light-heartedness of youth. Delighted shouts could be heard on all sides.

"This is the life!"

"Nature's blessings!"

"Oh, mother dear, the sun's hot!"

"But it isn't shining for you and me!"

"What weather, eh!"

Dzerzhinsky was sobbing for breath. There was a mist before his eyes. He could hear nothing but the thumping of his own heart and the words Rossol was whispering in his ear.

I must keep going, he told himself. I mustn't fall down here in the middle of the yard with Anton on my back.

He did not fall. The fifteen minutes came to an end. Zakharkin blew his whistle and gave the order to dismiss to the cells. Dzerzhinsky still had to carry Anton up to the third floor and along the corridors.

From then on he carried Rossol every day. In the course of the summer he did his heart a lot of harm.

But had he ever bothered about such trifles!

Someone is said to have made the following remark:

"Even if throughout his life Dzerzhinsky had never done anything else besides what he did for Rossol, he would still have deserved to have a monument erected in his memory."

Translated by Robert Daglish

The memorial to revolutionary fighters on the Field of Mars, Leningrad. The words carved in the granite mean:
Immortal is he
Who dies for
A great cause
He who gives
His life
For the people
Who works and fights
And dies
For the common good
Lives for ever
Among the people

Children in Leningrad, 1967

БЕССМЕРТЕН
ПАВШИЙ ЗА ВЕЛИКОЕ
ДЕЛО
В НАРОДЕ ЖИВ
ВЕЧНО
КТО ДЛЯ НАРОДА
ЖИЗНЬ ПОЛОЖИЛ
ТРУДИЛСЯ БОРОЛСЯ
И УМЕР
ЗА ОБЩЕЕ БЛАГО

ИМЯ ТВОЕ НЕИЗВЕСТНО
ПОДВИГ ТВОЙ БЕССМЕРТЕН

YELIZAVETA DRABKINA

A member of the Communist Party since 1917, Yelizaveta Drabkina (b. 1901) worked with many of Lenin's associates, including his wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya. She knew Lenin personally and was a witness of many episodes in his life, which she has described in her book *Crusts of Black Bread*. One of these stories is published here.

MEDITATION

That year there was a long sunny autumn and then the cold weather set in all at once. On the eve of the October Revolution celebrations an icy wind began to blow and by the second day of the holiday a snow-storm was pasting the windows with damp snow-flakes. Mother and I began to wonder whether to go to the concert at the Conservatoire, for which we had tickets. But how lucky it was that we did in the end decide to go!

The street was wrapped in flying snow-flakes. The illuminations shone dimly through the snowy gloom. Outside the House of Trade Unions stood a wooden statue of a soldier of the Red Army. The generals, landlords and factory-owners skewered on his bayonet symbolised the victories of recent weeks over Denikin and Yudenich.

Arm in arm, Mother and I pushed on against the wind, which was tearing at the banners and swinging the street wires. We made our way up to the Conservatoire along a narrow path trodden through the snow. The cloak-rooms were not in use. We just shook the snow off our coats and went upstairs.

The hall was nearly full when we entered. Attendants were bringing in music stands and arranging the music. Our tickets were for the fifth or sixth row of the stalls. Just in front of me there was a vacant seat and next to it sat a man wearing a fur-trimmed cap with ear-flaps. He had his coat collar up and sat hunched in his seat. Either he was very tired or else he was trying to get warm.

The players came on—in overcoats and fur hats. The woman pianist kept her woollen gloves on. Feeble squeaks and moans came from the instruments as they tuned up, as though even sounds were chilled stiff in the deathly cold. At last the con-

ductor, Sergei Kusevitsky, appeared. He was wearing tails, but instead of a boiled shirt a grey sweater showed between his lapels. He bowed briefly, breathed on his hands and lifted his baton. The concert began.

I wrapped my coat tighter round me and prepared myself to listen, but a nudge and a look from Mother made me glance at the man who was sitting in front and to the left of us. I saw that it was Lenin.

I had often seen Lenin. I had seen him speaking from the platform, presiding over meetings, and at home. On those occasions he had always been in action, full of movement. This was the first time I had seen him in a moment of meditation, absorbed in his own thoughts.

Listening and yet not listening to the overture to *Coriolanus*, I watched Lenin out of the corner of my eye. He was sitting very still, entirely engrossed in the music. The orchestra was gradually shaking off its numbness but still sounded rather muffled; the shivering drummer, however, when he had an entry to make, flailed his instruments with demonic energy.

"Like a horse just out of the stable," someone murmured humorously behind us.

The final chords rang out and there was a round of applause. Lenin stirred in his seat. I could see from the way he moved that he was trying to find a more comfortable position for his left shoulder, from which those Socialist-Revolutionary bullets had not yet been removed.

This movement reminded me of how the staff at the Council of People's Commissars and even the Secretariat of the Central Committee, whose offices were outside the Kremlin, had involuntarily walked about on tip-toe and talked in whispers for the first few days after Lenin had been wounded. Then

he began to get better, and how happy we were, when we went for dinner in the Kremlin dining-room, and saw him through the window taking his walks in the courtyard.

A fresh burst of applause interrupted my thoughts. Lenin had now changed his position and was sitting so that I could see the right half of his face. His expression was preoccupied, almost sad. A wave of profound affection for him swept over me.

I recalled the May Day of 1919. In those years that holiday of the international proletariat was celebrated differently from the way it is now. All revolutionary Moscow marched in orderly columns to the Red Square, listened to public speakers, marched past Lenin, sang songs, repeated their pledge of loyalty to the socialist revolution and, having spent several hours in Red Square, returned to their districts to finish celebrating this Day of International Solidarity of the Workers of the World.

Red Square was also quite different from what it is now. The graves of those who had died for the revolution stretched in a bare, bleak row under layers of turf along the Kremlin wall. The square was cobbled. Two tram-lines ran along the edge of it. The tram-cars screeched and groaned up the slope by the Museum of History, then rumbled down to the narrow structure that was the Moskvoretsky Bridge of those days. The row of mean buildings running from the foot of the Cathedral of St. Basil made the square seem smaller and more cramped than it does now.

That May Day, in 1919, it looked more festive than it ever had. The shopping arcade now known as GUM was draped with two huge scarlet banners,

one portraying a worker, the other, a peasant. Red pennants fluttered from every battlement of the Kremlin wall and even the statues of Minin and Pozharsky had red flags planted in their fists. On the ancient execution platform the new memorial to Stepan Razin stood under white drapes; it was to be unveiled that day. The fresh grave of Yakov Sverdlov was a mass of flowers.

The sun shone brightly. The trees were speckled with buds and their green tracery stood out against the clear sky. Everyone was in a joyful mood. News of victories by the Red Army was arriving from the fronts. Songs could be heard among the crowd and friends welcomed each other with a greeting that in those days was only just beginning to come into its own: "Happy May Day, Comrades!" Young people were chanting some of Demyan Bedny's latest verses:

O Scheidemann, you dirty scamp,
What pleasure life will bring,
When I set eyes upon the lamp
From which I know you'll swing.

At about mid-day Lenin came on to the square and was welcomed joyously by the cheering crowd. He gave an inspiring address, which he concluded with the words: "Long Live Communism!" Then he walked from one platform to another (there were several positioned in various parts of the square, so that everyone present could hear Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders). But someone stopped Lenin and handed him a spade

That year May Day had been declared a tree-planting day. Though it was still hemmed in with enemies, the Soviet Republic had decided to plant some young trees.

Chuckling to himself and rubbing his hands, Lenin took the spade and started digging beneath the Kremlin wall.

When the hole had been dug, a cart loaded with saplings drew up and Lenin was handed a slender young lime-tree. He placed it carefully in position, packed some earth round it, watered it in and, only when the job was finished, walked on and climbed the next platform.

In his first speech that day he had summed up the past; now his thoughts turned to the future, to the new world emerging from the smoke of war that lay thick over Soviet Russia. He saw that future both in the children who stood listening to him at the foot of the platform, and in the young trees that had just been planted.

People leaned on their spades and listened to him.

"Our grandchildren," he said, raising a hand that was still caked with dirt, "will look upon the documents and relics of the capitalist system as something quite outlandish. They will have difficulty in imagining how trade in the necessaries of life could ever have been in private hands, how the factories and mills could ever have belonged to private individuals, how one man could have exploited another, how there could ever have been people who did no work. Up to now, what our children will see has been talked of as if it were a fairy-tale, but now, comrades, you perceive quite clearly that the edifice of socialist society, of which we have laid the foundations, is no Utopia. Our children will build this edifice with even greater zeal."

He looked down at the children and after a slight pause said:

"We shall not see this future, just as we shall not see the crowning glory of these trees that have been

planted today; but our children will see that time. It will be seen by those who are in their youth today. . . ."

A burst of clapping announced the end of the first half of the concert. Everyone stood up stamping their feet and slapping themselves to get warm. Lenin also rose to his feet.

He put on his hat, struck his fists together, then turned round and saw Mother and me.

"Ah, Elizabeth-Sparrow!" he called out, using the nickname I had been given as a girl. He greeted Mother, then myself with that firm, quick handshake of his.

Yes, all those things actually happened.

And when you remember them today, it makes you want to be better, nobler, and always worthy of the lofty title of Communist.

Translated by Robert Daglish

VERA PANOVA

Vera Panova was born in 1905. She has written novels, plays, stories and film scripts (*Fellow Travellers*, *Seryozha*, *Time Walks*, *A Sentimental Novel*) and has three times been awarded a State Prize.

A Leningrad woman to the core, Panova knows and loves her city, the "cradle of the revolution". She has written several stories about its revolutionary past. The story included in this volume is about young people and the traditions they have inherited from their forefathers who made the revolution.

THREE BOYS AT THE GATE

Three boys stand at the gate of a fine house. One of those old mansions with yellow walls and white pillars that stand on the edge of the Field of Mars. It's hot August day, the last week of the holidays, of do-as-you-please, of hunting for checkerboard butterflies. Yes, it was a good summer, but it's over now.

"Let's have a smoke," Vitka says thoughtfully and hands round a packet of Belomors.

Sashka takes one.

"What about you?" Vitka asks Yurchik.

"No, thanks," Yurchik replies. "I've given it up."

"Really given it up for good?"

"Yes, for good."

He's a pale, puny little fellow in spectacles. Hardly comes up to Vitka and Sashka's shoulders. When his mother found out he had started smoking—they were living out in the country in summer and she saw the smoke rising over the bushes—she started sobbing her heart out, as if he had tried to commit suicide. It was more than he could bear and he decided to sacrifice his pleasure, just so that she wouldn't sob in that terrible way.

"Don't tempt him," Sashka says to Vitka. "If he's given it up, he's given it up."

"I'm not tempting him. I only offered."

"Well, don't. The man used to smoke and now he's given it up. That's not so easy. You've got to have strength of character."

These two great toughs are rather sorry for Yurchik for having such a dotty mother, but they respect him. And not just for his strength of character. In their eyes he is a miracle of book-learning and omniscience. You can ask him anything and he'll answer it. If not at once, by the follow-

ing day at the latest. They are very fond of him and they call him "Goggles".

There are tram-lines along the narrow road in front of the house, and beyond the tram-lines the pleasant, spacious park spreads its avenues of neat round-topped lime-trees, its stumpy little bushes and emerald patches of grass. The little lawns are dotted with silvery dandelion clocks. And over the park towers the deep-blue sky with its plump white clouds.... From the gate the boys can see the broad approach to Kirov Bridge and the Neva. That's where the monument to Suvorov is—a handsome young man in a helmet and tunic with bare, muscular calves. Vitka and Sashka used to think this was a sculpture of Generalissimo Suvorov, but Yurchik says it's Mars, the God of War. And the park, he says, is called the Field of Mars because it used to be a place for drilling and parades and there wasn't a thing growing here, not one little tree, not even a blade of grass; the soldiers' boots had stamped the ground as hard as rock and there used to be tornadoes of dust whirling over it.

The boys didn't arrive in time for anything like that. For as long as they can remember the Field of Mars has always been green and blossoming. Roses and other flowers in bloom, grannies and nurses sitting on the benches, children playing on the sandy paths. There are some special women there to keep order, and if they see anything wrong they blow their whistles. They watch the bigger boys like hawks because they always think the big ones have come to break the rules.

All that remains of the past on the Field of Mars are the sixteen old lamp-posts. Their lanterns are a funny shape, with dark glass windows. In the evening, when the whole field is lighted by little electric bulbs that glow like luminous pearls, the sixteen old lanterns shine with a dim, feeble, ob-

solete sort of light, as if they were shining from some other world. The lanterns stand in the middle of the field, round the common graves.

These graves are surrounded by a low granite wall and there are inscriptions cut in the grey granite. They are long inscriptions, of several lines each, some of which are in big letters, others in smaller ones.

The wall has openings on all four sides, providing entrance to the graves. Here are buried the martyrs of the revolution—but that was all a very long time ago, before these boys, or even their parents were born.

An eternal flame burns over the graves. It's a flame of gas, carried by an underground pipe with a burner at the end. The Leningrad gasmen inspect the burner to keep it working properly.

It's quite an ordinary thing really, nothing very special. These boys live in a city that has built a nuclear-powered ice-breaker. They are interested in outer space and artificial satellites. For them a gas burner is just a gas burner and nothing more. As far as they can see, the "eternal flame" merely means that the Leningrad gasmen are doing their job properly.

Those long inscriptions on the wall, so Yurchik once told them, were composed by Lunacharsky, by Comrade Lunacharsky, a People's Commissar. Yes, that was a long time ago, too. And in those days we didn't have any railway engines. They were all old and broken, and the Americans offered us a hundred new engines if we'd give them the grille round the Summer Gardens.

"Yes, that grille. You know it, don't you? Yes, for a hundred engines."

"I'd have swopped it," Vitka said.

"You would?"

"Well, it was a fair offer, wasn't it?"

"So you think that was a very good price—a hundred railway engines?!"

"Well, wasn't it?"

"What a blockhead!"

"Why am I a blockhead?" Vitka asked.

"Because we're making as many engines as we want, and not just steam engines but diesels and electric ones. But that grille is the only one in the world!"

Lunacharsky had been of the same opinion. And he had persuaded the Council of People's Commissars not to give up the grille.

"You mean there's really not another one like it in the whole world?" Sashka asked.

On one side are the Summer Gardens with their grille that is worth more than a hundred locomotives; on the other are the Mikhailovsky Gardens. If you turn left out of the gate, it's only a few steps to the Power Workers' Club, where they have a film show every evening. And farther on, across the bridge is the Peter and Paul Fortress. There's a sandy beach between the fortress and the river, just a narrow one. It is sheltered from the north winds by the fortress wall. People swim there and sunbathe. Vitka starts sun-bathing there in April—when there is any sun, of course. In April, even on sunny days the sand is cold as ice. You mustn't lie on it—you'd catch your death of cold. All the men, young and old, strip to the waist and sunbathe standing up. A patient, valiant crowd.

While you're still a kid, you can't imagine what a man's life is like. You think when your Dad's done his seven or eight hours he's finished for the day. Apart from a bit of voluntary work he may have to do, of course, or a meeting or two. But

when you begin to grow up and go out on your own, to the left and right of the gate, then you see what a mass of different things men have to occupy their time. Take the motor-cyclists every day in Stable Square, for instance, taking their driving tests. There's the examiner, a lieutenant of the militia, watching someone doing figures of eight on his motorbike. And there's a regular crowd of men, young and old, standing round. Rooted to the spot they are, won't move an inch. Just stand there looking on, criticising. One or two are on their way from work, still in overalls stained with whitewash or engine grease. Someone else has been round to the baker's for mother and is carrying a loaf in a string bag. Mother's waiting for her bread but he is lost to the world.

Sashka often goes to a shop on the Nevsky where they sell collector's stamps and that is always full of grown-up men, too. They jostle and push in the shop, then go outside for a smoke. They swop stamps with schoolboys, discuss the changes that are going on in the world and work out how many new states have appeared in Africa. They know as much about such things as any professor of geography, says Sashka.

On the avenue of the Mikhailovsky Gardens that runs along by the Moika Canal some men have organised a chess club. They bring along their own chess sets and play there. They get quite a crowd of fans round them. They hold tournaments. They have their Botvinniks and Tahls.

And here is yet another reason for respecting Yurchik. These serious people wanted him to play with them, actually invited him to compete in a tournament. And he would have done, too, if his mother hadn't taken him away to the country for he summer.

So, the three boys are standing there, at the gate, looking across at the Field of Mars. People stroll along the paths, the grannies and nurses sit and talk.

A tiny little girl in a red frock and a little boy in a white shirt are picking the dandelion clocks on the green lawn. The yard cleaner, who has just got the hose out to wash down the street, stands lost in admiration, shading her eyes from the sun and forgetting to turn on the water, as she peers at several black ZILs that have come sweeping round the bend, showing off their perfect suspension. A whole convoy of them, one after the other.

"What a lot!" Sashka remarks.

The ZILs slow down and more and more close up behind them till there's hardly room for them in the narrow street. Nose to tail, they climb cautiously over the tram-lines like large beetles and an approaching tram has to stop.

"Must be the Poles," Yurchik says.

"What makes you think that?" Vitka asks.

"It was in the paper."

"Yes, and they mentioned it on the radio," says Sashka. "A Polish delegation."

"They're going to lay a wreath," Yurchik says, "and take the eternal flame back to Poland with them."

"Take away the eternal flame? For keeps?" Vitka wants to know.

"They won't take it away. They'll just light a flame from ours and take that."

The ZILs have halted, some in the road, some on the broad avenue across the Field. Doors click. People get out. Two in trilbies, the others hatless. One is wearing a green jacket, the others are in fawn or grey raincoats.

Two men carry a large wreath up to the wall round the graves.

Passers-by stop to watch what is going on. The grannies and nurses hold hands with their children and hurry over to the graves from all sides.

The three boys head in the same direction, but they just saunter along with their hands in their pockets, preserving their dignity.

The people who arrived in the ZILs have gathered by the wall. The two who were wearing hats have now bared their heads like the others and the wind is playing through their hair. The one in the green jacket must be an interpreter. He keeps waving his arms and talking—must be translating the inscriptions—while the delegation stands round and listens. Then one of them moves out of the group and strides firmly through the entrance, to the centre of the square, where the eternal flame is burning. The others file after him. When he reaches the flame he goes down on one knee, and after that the boys can't see him any more because the others are in the way.

But what they have seen they like and expressions of pleasure and pride appear on their faces. Yes, they like the way that man went down on one knee and bowed his grey head. It looked so gallant and fine. They had never seen anyone kneel in reverence like that, they had only read of such things in historical novels.

But what really impresses them is that this man knelt at their common graves. He knelt in reverence on their own Leningrad earth and the wind from the Neva ruffled his grey hair.

And everyone looked on in silence. The passers-by, the children, the Leningrad power workers from the first floor of their club and the post-office workers from the ground floor.... But now the group of Poles has parted and the grey-haired man has reappeared and is walking back down the path to the cars. He is holding something in front of his

chest in his right hand and shielding it with his left. That must be the flame they have lighted from ours and are taking back to their own country. The grey-haired man is followed by the others. The car-doors click. The delegation gets in, so does the interpreter in the green jacket.

And that's all. The black ZILs hum gently as they turn round, then the whole splendid procession of gleaming black limousines rolls away. The trams again go clanking past. The grannies and nurses return to their benches.

Still sauntering along casually, hands in pockets, the three boys, without saying a word, head for the graves. They grew up near these graves; every day, summer and winter, they have seen this granite wall with its inscriptions composed by Lunacharsky. But none of them, not even Yurchik, has ever got around to reading those inscriptions properly. At the age of eleven or twelve you somehow aren't terribly interested in what is written on gravestones.

But now they walk slowly round the wall and stop at every inscription to read with care and appreciation those stern and solemn lines. The boys want to know what it was the Poles read on these graves and what they took away with them to Poland from our Field of Mars.

NOT KNOWING THE NAMES
OF ALL THE HEROES IN THE STRUGGLE
FOR FREEDOM
OF ALL THOSE WHO SHED THEIR BLOOD
THE HUMAN RACE
HONOURS THE NAMELESS
IN MEMORY
AND HONOUR OF THEM ALL
HAS THIS STONE BEEN PLACED
TO STAND HERE
THROUGH THE AGES

They read in silence, to themselves. Sashka frowns, Vitka gapes, his pink lips lolling open, Yurchik's small face wears an expression of intense concentration.

Fast or slow, they eventually grasp the meaning of these words. And just look at that—no punctuation marks! After all the bother they cause, it turns out you can get on quite well without them. This is written for the years to come, for Russians, for Poles, for all the nations, so one can't be bothered with a lot of punctuation marks.

IMMORTAL IS HE
WHO DIES FOR
A GREAT CAUSE
HE WHO GIVES
HIS LIFE
FOR THE PEOPLE
WHO WORKS AND FIGHTS
AND DIES
FOR THE COMMON GOOD
LIVES FOR EVER
AMONG THE PEOPLE

The little boy in the white shirt and the little girl in the red frock stand at a distance watching the big boys reading the inscriptions. They are probably waiting for something else to happen. Perhaps someone else will go down on one knee? But the big boys merely take the cigarette stubs out of their mouths and put them away in their pockets.

YOU PROLETARIAN
AROSE
FROM THE DEPTHS OF OPPRESSION
POVERTY AND IGNORANCE
TO WIN
FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS
YOU WILL BENEFIT

ALL MANKIND
AND FREE IT
FROM SLAVERY

They go inside the wall. The wreath brought by the Poles stands in the corner. In a hollow on a small square platform in the middle burns the eternal flame. Fluttering in the wind under the bright sunlight, it looks like a gold and scarlet banner. This is the flame those Poles came here to get. The flame that the gasmen keep an eye on to make sure it burns for ever.

NOT VICTIMS BUT HEROES
LIE BENEATH THESE STONES
YOUR FATE ROUSES
NOT GRIEF BUT ENVY
IN THE HEARTS
OF ALL YOUR GRATEFUL
DESCENDANTS
IN THOSE RED AND TERRIBLE DAYS
YOU LIVED GLORIOUSLY
AND DIED A FINE DEATH

Well, and what if the gasmen do have to keep an eye on it, the boys think to themselves. Of course, they have to, and they have to keep it clean when it gets clogged. It wouldn't work otherwise.

And what if it did happen to go out one day, when that hurricane blew it out. The wind blew it out, but people lit it again, and they'll do the same again if necessary. Yes, of course it's eternal, an eternal flame.

And the gravestones at their scratched, sunburnt feet, in their dusty sandals, speak to them in soft voices, telling them about the dead.

"Died in action against the Whiteguards."

"Murdered by Right Socialist-Revolutionaries."

"Killed at the front."

"Killed by Whiteguard Finns."

"Murdered by Whiteguards during the suppression of the Yaroslavl uprising in July 1918."

"Here lie buried those who fell in battle during the February Revolution and the Great Revolution of October 1917."

YOU WENT TO WAR
AGAINST WEALTH
POWER AND KNOWLEDGE
FOR THE FEW
AND YOU DIED HONOURABLY
SO THAT WEALTH
POWER AND KNOWLEDGE
SHOULD BECOME
THE LOT OF ALL

The three boys, hands in pockets, stroll away from the graves.

Yes, it's quite right, they are thinking, that foreigners should make note of such things and take them away abroad. Yes, that's as it should be. What was written there? You lived gloriously and died a fine death. In those faraway, red and terrible days.

"But why 'terrible'?" Vitka asks.

But his friends don't want to discuss that at the moment. They have too much to think about. Yurchik has clamped his pale lips tight shut to show he doesn't want to talk. You do some thinking yourself, Vitka, with your own head, if you can.

The boys walk in silence down the smooth avenue between the neatly clipped lime-trees and those lofty words beat in their hearts.

They left just in time. A woman with a whistle was just hurrying up to the graves. She had noticed the boys and she ran as fast as her legs would carry her. She thought, so she told the grannies and nurses afterwards, that they were going to steal the flowers from the wreath. But they went away and

nothing had happened to the wreath. And in her annoyance at having made herself run for nothing the woman blew a parting blast at them on her whistle.

The little girl in the red frock and the little boy in the white shirt went back to their clocks. They hadn't understood a thing. The time had not yet come for them to understand. The little girl sat down, spreading out her red frock so that she looked like a big red flower. And both of them, the boy and the girl, looked like flowers on that bright-green patch of grass.

Translated by Robert Daglish

REQUEST TO READERS

Progress Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book, its translation and design and any suggestions you may have for future publications.

Please send your comments to 21, Zubovsky Boulevard, Moscow, U.S.S.R.

THE OCTOBER STORM AND AFTER

Stories and Reminiscences

"We were the first to be fortunate enough to tell people about life under socialism and of the struggle to establish socialism." All the other contributors to this volume may justly subscribe to the above together with the author Alexander Fadeyev, for all of them took part in the Great October Socialist Revolution. Among their number are A. Lunacharsky, the first People's Commissar for Education, Academician V. Bonch-Bruyevich, A. Kollontai, a well-known woman revolutionary, the writers Maxim Gorky, Mikhail Sholokhov, Vsevolod Ivanov, Valentin Katayev, Kornei Chukovsky. Many of the stories were written between 1920 and 1940, but there is also a large selection of modern writings by such well-known contemporary authors as Vera Panova, Yuri German and others.

There are stories about the years of underground revolutionary work, the heroic era of the Civil War and the great, revolutionary forward thrust of the people building a new society.